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*The life of sister Jeanne Bénigne Gojos,
lay-sister of the Visitation of holy Mary*

Marie Geltrude E. Provane de Leyni, Jeanne Bénigne Gojos











Burns & Oates London
1878

LIFE LOST

OF

SIR JOHN JEANNE, BART. &c.

BY JOHN GALT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. GALT

THE LIFE OF SIR JOHN JEANNE, BART. &c.
BY JOHN GALT

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BY JOHN GALT



LONDON: BURNS AND GATES

1877



THE LIFE
OF
SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE GOJOS,
LAY-SISTER
OF THE
VISITATION OF HOLY MARY,
WHO DIED IN THE ODOUR OF SANCTITY IN THE
MONASTERY OF TURIN, IN 1692.
BY
MOTHER MARIE GELTRUDE PROVANE DE LEYNI,
RELIGIOUS OF THE SAME ORDER.



LONDON: BURNS AND OATES.
1878.

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ACCORDING to the injunctions of Pope Urban VIII. we protest that what is contained in this book rests solely on private authority, and that the glorious titles given to the servant of God have no other value than the opinion of a simple individual, who wishes always and in everything to submit to the infallible judgment of Holy Church.

PREFATORY EPISTLE.

FROM OUR MONASTERY OF TURIN.

January, 1846.

HONOURED AND VERY DEAR SISTERS,

There was in the land of the little Benjamin* a hidden treasure which we could not, beloved Sisters, enjoy alone. Urged no less by the wish to give you pleasure than by the desire of our holy Father St. Francis of Sales that there should be a complete community of goods among his daughters, we come to share it with your charities, by offering you the Life of our beloved Sister Jeanne Bénigne Gojos.

In arranging our library we found three large volumes of manuscript, in the handwriting of our honoured Mother Marie Geltrude Elisabeth Provane de Leyni, containing the life and virtues of that blessed Sister, already prepared for being printed when circumstances should permit. This discovery was a joy to us, for our aged Sisters often took pleasure in relating to us the singular graces with which that holy soul was favoured; and we hope that the reading of this pious work will equally delight your charities.

* The Monastery of the Visitation of Turin was the last of the foundations of our holy Mother.

You will find in these admirable pages the most sublime sanctity combined with the amiable simplicity of the Visitation; you will see in them, it seems to us, the divine Théotime of our holy Founder, under the most perfect and attractive aspect.

In transcribing these old manuscripts, we have remedied some slight imperfections, but we have been scrupulously exact in preserving the sense of the author and the substance of the facts. As to those parts that were written by our Sister Jeanne Bénigne, we have taken good care not to alter them in the slightest degree.

If this humble and pious recital, which we beg you, our beloved Sisters, to accept, should refresh and console your piety; above all, if it were to produce in our dear Monasteries some little Bénigne, our consolation would be immense, and we should ever rejoice in having found the hidden treasure.

With respectful sentiments of the most perfect and sincere affection we have the honour to be, in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, honoured and very dear Sisters,

Your most humble and unworthy Sisters and servants in our Lord,

THE SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE
VISITATION OF HOLY MARY.

BLESSED BE GOD.

P R E F A C E.

BEFORE I enter upon the details of the holy life of our devout Sister Jeanne Bénigne Gojos, it seems to me fitting to state that I was chosen by holy obedience to undertake this work. Many of our sisters were struck by the graces they observed in our dear Bénigne, who could not always hide them under the veil of humility so completely as to let no trace of them appear, and they had often wished that some account of them should be drawn up, or that she herself should be obliged to write down what passed within her. But in the year 1686, during our annual retreats, our Lord so increased these desires, that being unable to resist them, they entreated our honoured Mother Thérèse Radegonde de Saint Germain, at that time our Superior, to oblige our devout Sister Bénigne, who was then near her death, to manifest her interior states to some one among us, for their edification and for the glory of God. That dear Mother, being herself interiorly urged to it, yielded to their entreaties, and chose us for that purpose. At the same time she ordered Sister Bénigne to unveil her whole soul to us, and to bring to light the heavenly secrets between her and her Beloved, choosing the

time of her retreat to give her this obedience, which she received with humility and confusion.

I, on my part, feared no less to enter upon those divine communications, feeling myself too material to treat of things so sublime ; and I therefore took the whole of Advent to prepare myself, and to pray for the dispositions necessary for receiving the revelation of this secret of the everlasting God. However, on the Feast of St. Lucy, the day which ended the mortal life of our venerable Mother de Chantal, I respectfully addressed Sister Bénigne, asking her if we had not something to say to each other and to do together ; adding that her duty and mine seemed to me equally difficult and important, but that God would do it all, as we should labour only to accomplish His holy Will.

On this she assured me that she well knew it to be so, since God had several times shown her clearly that we were both to accomplish it, each obeying in her own way ; that she had to tell me from God that it was He who had destined me for this office ; and that not only then, but for a long time past, and on several occasions, our Lord had pointed me out to her as the person who was one day to be the depository of all the treasures of grace which He had been pleased to pour into her soul.

This reminded me that, in fact, many years before, when I set out for our foundation at Rome, she foretold to me that I should soon return, and that I should be her Superior, to fulfil the will of God in her regard. It was necessary, she added, that I should see her live

and die in order to execute the work for which God had destined me. To reassure me still more, and to encourage us both in the work, she also told me that, when she alleged to our first Mothers, de Lucinge and de Corbeau, the impossibility of writing down her graces, as she had been expressly ordered to do by our venerable Mother de Chantal, they had often said to her: "Tell them to our little one (that was the name they gave me in their charitable affection), and God will certainly give her intelligence to understand your graces, and wisdom to describe them." These favours I hope to have received from the Eternal Goodness according to their promise, not by my own merits, but by those of this worthy daughter of our holy Founders, and for the advantage and glory of our holy Institute, to which this Life, I think, cannot fail to be most useful and profitable.

Therefore, both of us being fortified by the assurance that the work was pleasing to our Lord, I began to penetrate into the inmost recesses of this chosen soul. Little by little, she came to speaking to me of the abundance of her divine graces with complete openness and simple confidence, with so much feeling and in such appropriate terms, that I was astonished; for she did not seem like the same silent and timid Sister, who could scarcely say two words together on any other subject.

At Whitsuntide, wishing to begin my memoirs, I asked her if she had not some hidden things to tell me, or some writing to show me. She blushed and

showed signs of great emotion, saying, "What! must I make known the prodigious munificence of the mercy of God towards me! Alas! if so, what abyss can I find in which to hide my confusion on account of my want of correspondence with it! O Sister! let us rather speak of my profound miseries, than of the sublime favours conferred on me by the love of God! Relate my ingratitude to all the world, and do not force me to speak of His immense bounty: it would require a miracle to bring me to proclaim secrets so hidden and so interior, which I have been so ashamed to write, only daring to keep the papers in the remotest cellars. How can I speak of what passed between our Lord and His unfaithful *Bénigne*! I should so lower its value by my expressions, that what I should say would convey no idea of what I had felt."

However, a still more pressing order of our Superior obliged her at last to hand over to me all the scraps of paper she had written upon, amounting to more than seven or eight hundred. She had written down her graces in obedience to her Superiors, and to our Lord Himself, who had threatened to deprive her of them all, if she did not write them all down. These notes were so scattered here and there, that she hoped no one would ever succeed in putting them in any intelligible order; and indeed, this was my greatest difficulty, and I accomplished it only by dint of labour and study, passing even several nights in this holy occupation. I completed the task that had been given me, just four years before the death of this devout servant of God;

and I only added afterwards some new favours she received from Heaven, her state of perfect union, the account of her last sufferings, and of her death, which we have every reason to believe was precious in the sight of God.

In writing this life I have kept to the simplicity of style suited to a daughter of the Visitation, who has studied nothing but the Holy Scriptures and the works of her holy Father Francis of Sales. I attribute all the success of this labour solely to God, to whom alone I had recourse for aid, never beginning my work without invoking the Holy Ghost with the perfect confidence which He has given me in His goodness, entreating that Finger of the Almighty to guide my pen Himself; and this I may hope to have obtained, for during all the time I was so occupied I experienced an interior unction very sweet and profitable to my soul, and felt neither trouble nor weariness from the length of the work or the difficulties I met with in it.

As this dear Sister fulfilled the desire of our holy Father by perfectly combining the offices of Martha and Magdalen, I have decided to describe separately her *active* life, which will form the first part of this work. The second will consist of her *contemplative* life, or her interior states. I reserve for the third the special graces she received at various times, which she called *fragments of the rich gifts of God*, precious crumbs of the delicious banquet of the holy words so often imprinted on her heart, and so often verified by their merciful effects. The whole will be followed by

several testimonies to the solidity of her virtues, and to the truth of the graces bestowed on her by our Lord, given by persons equally distinguished for learning and virtue. These will, I hope, confirm the authenticity of the facts which I am about to publish in all frankness and simplicity, in the presence of God, to His glory, and to the spiritual advantage of those numerous souls who may, in the course of time, according to the promise made to this blessed Sister by our Lord Himself, drink long draughts of the delicious water of heavenly consolations in this book.

In relating the virtues of our dear Sister, I do not attempt to explain the sublime states through which it pleased God to make her pass. I am neither sufficiently learned nor spiritual to do so; on the contrary, I submit all that I am about to say to the judgment of others. I also declare that I intend to write nothing but what may be entirely conformable to the mystic meaning of Holy Church, and that in making use of these words—*divine, ineffable, adorable, holy*, I never intend to speak but of a participation purely merciful, and thus to express better the graces which we dare so to name, believing that they emanated from God Himself and from His love. Lastly, as the Holy Ghost tells us that our Lord is holy with the holy, innocent with the innocent, I venture to add that He was faithful with His faithful spouse, the devout Jeanne Bénigne. She herself, I think, unconsciously proved the truth of her graces more clearly than any one else could, by this simple

avowal, which she made to me many times unawares ;
“That since her entrance into religion, God had been
unceasingly the one object of her thoughts, the only
love of her heart, and His glory the end of all her
actions. That she did not think she had ever refused
anything to the holy impulses of grace, nor did she
think she had ever granted anything to herself that
she could lawfully refuse herself, during the fifty-seven
years of her religious life. That she had never
desired anything but the perfection of the pure love
of God, and suffering ; having over and over again
offered herself as a victim to divine justice, preferring
the pleasure of suffering even to the enjoyment of
glory.”

But let us come to facts in detail, and we shall see
what our weak nature can do, with the aid of grace,
and what marvels grace is sometimes pleased to operate
in this our feeble nature.

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LIFE OF

SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE GOJOS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOTIVES WHICH INDUCED SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE TO
WRITE DOWN THE GRACES WHICH SHE RECEIVED FROM GOD.



HE Holy Spirit, speaking in His marvellous Canticle of the sacred reciprocal love of the Incarnate Word and of the soul His spouse, seems to have taken pleasure in making them describe it themselves by turns. I think that I cannot do better than follow the same method in this work, by giving as far as possible the actual conferences of this humble Sister, as they are found in her writings, and the first of them will form this chapter.

“In the presence of the adorable Trinity, and of the triumphant Mother of God, I will endeavour to describe, not the life of her of whom I am ordered to speak, but the mercies of God in her regard. The recital of the first would be wearisome, because it would only be filled with my failings, my sins, and my ingratitude towards that Infinite Goodness which has so often seemed to be occupied only in doing good to

me. But the second, which I am obliged to describe by obedience and by so many repeated commands either of my Lord Jesus Christ, or of those who have held and who now hold His place towards me, is a very delightful, and I might say an almost inexhaustible subject. I must, however, do it, if I wish to please the Author of my graces, who has so often told me that I could not please Him better than by making them known. For this sweet Saviour has assured the poor criminal Bénigne, that she will not be released from her mortal prison till she has related all the benefits she has received from Him, since He wills that she should in this way exalt His glory, and has promised that if she is faithful in obeying Him by this manifestation, His divine eyes will be ever turned towards her.

“But, alas! what can I say, O my Lord, of that sweet intercourse of love which Thy grace maintains between Thy Infinite Majesty and Thy poor creature, but that she is, and that Thou keepest her entirely abandoned to Thy divine good pleasure! Every one knows that Thou lovest Thy creatures, and that Thou canst show special love to those whom Thou dost choose, since Thy divine charity is but an intercourse and a bond of friendship between Thee and the soul, so that great and infinite God as Thou art, Thou wilt to unite Thyself intimately with our littleness! But to express in what manner Thou hast drawn close and perfected this holy and merciful union between Thee my All, and my nothingness, is what I

do not think I can do, so perfect, so full of love, and of pure pleasure hast Thou rendered it : nor do I think I can lay open the secret and intimate confidence which is the result of this reciprocal love. I will only say that nothing can equal its sweetness. God loves me, and He wills me to believe that I on my part love Him, by the effect of His grace and of that very love ! This has made me a million times admire Thy royal generosity, O Great and Sacred Heart of Jesus, so immense in mercy ! Yes, O Lord, I must own it, my extreme misery has not been able to limit Thy love ; and Thy grace, infinite in power, has overthrown the barrier of my ingratitude, so that it could not restrain the course and torrents of Thy divine liberality from pouring itself into my poor soul. After this confession, which I am obliged by obedience and by Thy love to make to Thy glory, there is no consideration which can any longer prevent me from writing down the profusion of Thy gifts, not even the fear I have had of exposing myself to censure. Henceforward I must content myself with knowing that nothing is safe for me but obedience, and that under its shadow I walk in security ; its power leads captive all my reasonings ; it brings all my own views into subjection to faith, and my feelings to pure love. This virtue of my Spouse will make me submissive to the end of my life to those who guide me.

“ I will write as concisely as I possibly can, employing in this occupation only the time that I have been told to give to it every day. I have even done it

almost without reluctance since I have seen so clearly that God wills it. He has promised me that nothing, not even bodily ills, shall hurt me, if I give Him this proof of my love and submission; that on the contrary everything shall serve me as a ladder to mount to Him.

"I confess in the first place that I am only a phantom in the house of God, without any good thing of my own, not yet knowing myself well enough to fathom the depth of my nothingness and misery. Ah! for this I should wish to be eloquent, that I might better exalt the excess of Thy goodness, O Lord. With this view, I even had recourse to the lights of others, for which I was severely reproved, my Love having told me that I must write only under His dictation, and that Thou art so jealous in my regard that Thou art even jealous of Thy graces, and wilt not have me turn away from Thee to look at them.

"But wilt Thou not permit me, O Lord, to say again here, that I have undergone terrible fears of being deluded, not for my own sake, but for the honour of Thy heavenly favours. Alas! Thou knowest, O my God, that I have feared in my fears, that I have feared in my security, or rather in that which Thou gavest me; that I have feared in my privations; that I have feared in my possessions; that I have feared amid doubts; that I have feared even in the feeling of my faith; that I have feared in my mistrust and been apprehensive in my hope; and that to complete my martyrdom I have feared in my love itself; but I

should add that these cruel fears have never caused me disturbance or uneasiness, but rather that by exciting my confidence and my love, they have produced in me a more complete abandonment to the Divine Will, especially since Thou didst tell me, O Lord, that I should find reassurance in these words of Jeremias, that when figs are good, they are perfectly good.

“I had never then seen those words of Scripture in any book, nor heard of them. All those, however, to whom I have spoken of Thy favours, O Lord, have assured me of their truth; there was only one who made me suffer by his strong opposition, but after many trials, he himself told me he had made me undergo them only that he might be able to reassure me more completely by declaring to me with perfect certainty that my graces came truly from God and were derived from His infinite mercy. May it be for ever praised !”

CHAPTER II.

HER BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD—THE DANGERS FROM WHICH SHE WAS DELIVERED—HER EDUCATION—HER FIRST COMMUNION—THE REST OF HER LIFE IN THE WORLD.



OUR dear Sister Jeanne Bénigne was born on the 20th of July, in the year 1615, at Viuz, in Véronay, a little French village in the diocese of Geneva. Her father and mother were Antoine Gojos and Claudine l'Empereur, both of respectable families, and themselves fearing God,

observing His commandments, and practising works of mercy.

This dear child received the grace of Baptism on the Feast of St. Magdalen, which seemed to foretell that the little creature would be, as indeed she was, a true lover of Jesus, but always innocent.

Her mother chose for her the name of Jeanne, because her birth, like that of St. John Baptist, gave great joy to all her family ; but I think it was so disposed by Providence to point out that she would be a child of grace.

Being endowed by nature with beauty and gentleness, she was an object of tender care to all her relations, especially to her maternal grandfather, Anthelme l'Empereur (who is mentioned in the history of the Royal House of Savoy by Guichenon). He was the richest and most respected person in the little town of Fernay, near St. Rambert, but was still more remarkable for his great charity to the poor. This good man insisted on having little Jeanne to live with him, and brought her up and educated her with great care.

The first words she pronounced were these: "I want to be a saint;" and afterwards when she was asked what she would like to be, she never answered anything but "I want to be a saint. Yes, yes, Jeanne wants nothing else but holiness."

At four years old she was attacked by the small-pox, which changed and disfigured her features, for the Spouse to whom she was destined loves interior

beauty alone, and regards not that which is exterior, and passes away like the flowers of the field. The illness was so serious that her parents fearing for her life, promised to take her to the shrine of St. Claude, if she were cured. She was hardly free from this danger when she met with another still greater; as she was playing near a large fire she suddenly fell into it, and might have been burnt to death in a moment; but although they ran from a distance to take her out, they were astonished to find that only one hand was a little hurt.

The great danger she had run made her parents resolve to take little Jeanne to St. Claude for the fulfilment of their vow; but this Saint added a third favour to the two he had already conferred on them. The man who was carrying her on horseback was nearly drowned in crossing a river; this danger, which was seen with alarm by the parents who had already crossed, made them cry for mercy, and invoke anew the deliverer of their child; no sooner had they done this than they beheld out of danger, like a little Moses rescued from the water, her who was like him to enjoy familiarity with God, and to offer herself as a victim to His justice for the salvation of her brethren.

Thus did this little one, who was one day to be the daughter of the Visitation, and of our venerable Mother de Chantal, three times find life at the gate of St. Claude, where our holy Mother found rest, and where the Institute was planned and commenced.

On her return from this journey, little Jeanne was

still more gentle and more devout than before, her only amusement being to make little altars, and then to remain kneeling before them with great reverence, repeating continually "Jeanne wants to be a saint."

Although Divine Providence had destined this child to be the spouse of Jesus Christ, He permitted her, as He has done with regard to other holy souls, to be promised in marriage by her father, from her childhood, to one who might have been considered a desirable husband, if she had been created for the enjoyment of a perishable fortune. As soon as she was old enough, she had masters to teach her reading and writing and all that might render her accomplished in society, such as singing and dancing, for she had a liking and talent for both. In after-life she was surprised and grateful that her parents had taken pains to give her so good an education that she might have been taken, she said, for a person of high rank ; for the same care was not bestowed on her sisters, whom her father sent to the ordinary schools. This distinction rendered her very graceful and well-bred, and pleasing to every one ; but it nearly inspired her with a spirit of pretension which afterwards made her shed many tears, remembering that she had often omitted to join the public processions, because she thought none of the girls in the town were sufficiently well-dressed to walk with her. She even took pains, with the taste that was natural to her, to have her dress made in the fashion of the great towns.

The touches of grace checked, however, her attach-

ment to all these little follies, which might have interfered with her early love and inclination for holiness, if she had not been on her guard. She was only seven years old when the funeral train that was transporting the body of our holy Founder from Lyons to Annecy, passed through Fernay. The holy body was deposited for the night in the house of the grandfather of Jeanne, and she recollected having had strong feelings of devotion while she tenderly venerated those sacred remains.

“At the age of eleven,” she says in her memoirs, “I made my first communion, and our Lord gave me the grace to prepare myself for it with care and devotion.” She received the Bread of Angels with a degree of love and respect which, no doubt, corresponded rather with what she would one day be than with what she could be at that age. This Sacrament inspired her with such tender devotion that her greatest pleasure was to remain often and for a very long time in church before the altar, drawing with holy ardour as near to it as reverence permitted. She would have wished, she said, to hide herself in the tabernacle, to be nearer to God, hidden there through love; but she surpassed herself in those pious feelings on the day of the Feast and during the Octave, when the Church exposes that divine Sacrament upon our altars. On those happy days her assiduity in keeping herself before Him in the spirit of adoration was remarkable, and she even then tasted the sweetness of that sacred manna. She says in her writings, “It seemed to me that when that time was past I was a

poor orphan, no longer having my Divine Saviour before my eyes."

She obeyed the direction of her confessors, making their advice her guide in all her conduct, and she followed the example of her good mother, who was a true Philothea in spiritual reading; and by the divine mercy she never read anything else. Reading the holy Gospel inspired her with such lights and such unction, that her heart was penetrated with reverence and love for God and with hatred of the least voluntary imperfection. That fruitful seed, cast on such good ground, was neither stifled nor lost: it was cultivated by *grace*, and her co-operation made it produce a hundredfold.

The world, nevertheless, strove to lead somewhat astray this young person who was walking so swiftly in the paths of virtue. It made use of the eagerness of all her relations to have her with them, each one considering it a happiness to possess her; for these frequent changes of abode and little journeys greatly distracted her in her pious exercises. One of her uncles was so fond of her that he gave her the care of his house, and made her absolute mistress of it; and as she acquitted herself of this charge with great prudence and advantage to him, he thought of marrying her to a person much richer than the one who had been chosen by her father. On this occasion the only desire she used to have, that of being holy, was forgotten for awhile. Vanity, frivolous pastimes, and even love of creatures made violent assaults on her

heart ; but God, who had chosen her to be His alone, drove these little foxes out of that fair vineyard, not allowing them to penetrate any farther, and made use of this false step to put her in the right way, and to induce her to seek an abode of perfect safety.

CHAPTER III.

HER RELIGIOUS VOCATION—HER ENTRANCE INTO THE FIRST MONASTERY OF THE VISITATION OF HOLY MARY OF ANNECY—HER NOVICIATE.

HE vocation of each soul is like that white stone on which is written the name that no one can understand except him who receives it ; and this secret can be imparted to us only by that Holy Spirit who is the true Counsellor of our heart. I shall relate that of Jeanne Bénigne in the very terms of her own memoir, which are as follows :—“ In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Let all be said to the glory of God and through obedience. Having been clearly shown at communion that God willed me to be absolutely His, I resolved to put an end to my resistance, and to declare my intention of retiring from the world, which I had not dared to do for fear of violent opposition on the part of my relations. I communicated it first to my confessor, who strongly dissuaded me, representing the thing to be impossible, especially as my establishment in the world would cost my father nothing, for

that uncle of whom I have spoken would give my dowry, and my grandfather promised to furnish all the rest.

“In my affliction I had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, entreating her to teach me how to put in execution the strong resolution I had made to belong to God, and giving her only a few months to do it in. During this time, by a sort of miracle, I found means, through one of our out-sisters of Annecy, of asking to be received there without any one knowing it. After this I left my uncle, and returned to my father and mother, whose house, being the resort of all the religious who came that way, and presenting nothing but examples of piety, gave me more facilities for preparing myself for the grace I expected to obtain from the Blessed Virgin. My father, who had become blind in consequence of a bad fall, bore his blindness like the good Tobias, blessing and serving God with heroic patience. My mother governed the whole family like a truly valiant woman and a perfect Christian. I have seen her practise acts of great virtue.

“At the end of the limit I had given to Mary, my powerful Advocate, the out-sister, together with the chaplain of our first Monastery at Annecy, arrived at our house, saying quite frankly that they had come to take me away to that holy place, and that our Mothers had granted me admission into their house. I had made this choice the better to accomplish my desire of being a saint, for I had heard of the sublime perfection of the life that was led there. I had also in view

to go to a distance from my relations and my country, in order that God might more readily make known to me His Will.

“ My father and mother reproached me gently for having taken all these steps without saying anything to them ; my father especially seemed unable to resolve to consent to my departure, but my good mother, seeing me firm in my just desire, said to him, ‘ Alas, dear husband ! I brought forth this child almost without suffering or inconvenience ; I nursed her without fatigue ; she has never cost us anything ; so that we may say she has always been our joy without giving us any pain. It is only just that we should feel a little in sacrificing her to God, in order that our sacrifice may be more pleasing to His Divine Majesty. Let us both adore His divine Will.’

“ After this I received their blessing, not without feeling some disturbance in the inferior part of my nature, caused by my extreme affection for them. My other relations, on hearing of my resolution, determined to oppose it ; and this made me at once beg my mother to send me away by night. She did so four hours before daybreak on the eve of St. John, that I might arrive at Annecy the morning of Holy Innocents day ; Mother Péronne Marie de Châtel, who was then Superior of that holy Mother-house, having ordered that I should enter it on that day.”

The thirteenth anniversary of the precious death of our blessed Father Francis of Sales was being celebrated

on that very day, and this postulant was no sooner on her knees before his tomb, than she began to feel a grace which may have had some little resemblance to that which the great St. Paul received at the moment of his conversion ; for she felt herself not only blind to all worldly objects, but dead to all worldly feelings.

God had given her in one communion the talent of a religious vocation, and in that which she made in this first church of the Visitation, He bestowed on her the means of multiplying it, by a gift of infused prayer which she had never heard spoken of. He occupied her so fully with Himself, that He became thenceforward the Sovereign Master of her whole being by a continual perception and adoration of His divine Will in all things. This thought alone gave her strength to surmount all the difficulties of making the great transition from a secular to a religious life. She now met her mother and her eldest brother, who had accompanied her, with holy indifference, and listened not to the complaints they both made when they learnt that she was only to be received as a lay-sister. She entered the house of God, scarcely bidding them adieu, without embracing the mother to whom she was so much attached, and who was so amiable a person that our Mother de Châtel was charmed with her manners, and assured her that even if she had not the affection she already had for the daughter, she would still have received her for love of the mother. This lady was a near relation of our honoured Mother Marie Jacqueline Favre. It was on the 30th of De-

ember, 1635, that she gave to God her dear Jeanne, who was twenty years and some months old.

This young girl became at once a true religious, dead to herself and living wholly in God. The next morning she left off her worldly dress, which was very handsome, and put on that of a servant-maid, with a quilted bodice, and a petticoat of serge. After eight days she was put on her trial in the domestic employment of Martha, which could never for one moment interrupt her in the occupation of Mary, nor hinder the sight of her sweet Love, who made His divine presence familiar and continual to her. "No," she said afterwards, "I do not think I have ever lost sight of God since I set my foot in a religious house; He is necessarily present to me either by sensible love, or by an interior sentiment of vivid faith, or by that bond of union which binds and keeps me close to the Will of my Divine Spouse in everything and everywhere. Certainly, my only aim in entering religion was to sanctify myself with the help of grace in the most perfect manner possible; this was also my reason for choosing our Institute by preference, and God had made known to me that it was the place where I might attain to that high perfection of pure love to which He deigned to make me aspire.

"I thought the virtue of our Sisters so sublime that I had some doubt whether I should be able to imitate them; but our Mother Favre, to whom I had the honour to belong, and who kindly looked on me as her relation, and had known me at my home when

she was travelling, animated me to pursue my enterprise, and to take courage, generously assuring me that all may be acquired by loving God and serving Him well. I constantly called to mind that my station obliged me to be under submission to every one; that I was in that holy place only to remain united to our Lord Jesus Christ annihilated under the form of a servant."

She was placed in the noviciate under the direction of our honoured Sister Marie Aimée de Rabutin, who perceived at once that she was a chosen soul; our Mother de Châtel also knew this, and like a faithful spouse acquainted with the secrets of the Divine Spouse, she took especial pains to try the virtue and to ascertain the interior state of this newcomer. She was found to be not only virtuous, but so destitute of passions and of all imperfect feelings, that they wished to see whether there were in her any constraint, or affectation to appear what she was not in reality. To attain this end they gave her a great deal to do, and often changed her employments, sending her sometimes to the bakehouse, sometimes to the garden, then to the washing, and afterwards back to the kitchen; but her virtue followed her everywhere, her interior spirit and her submission did not diminish, she was equable under every mortification; the inferior part seemed destroyed in her, as if she had no tastes nor natural feelings; she had neither joys nor desires, nor will of her own. She was deprived of the Sacraments, forbidden all spiritual reading and exercises, and reduced

to vocal prayer alone ; she was taken out of the noviciate to be put under the care of a lay-sister who was very experienced in the supernatural life. Notwithstanding all this, the gentle modesty and profound recollection of this postulant were never seen to be in the least disturbed ; she who sought God alone, found God in all things.

At last she was told to speak to our venerable Mother de Chantal, who, with that perfect discernment of spirits given her by God, judged favourably of the ways by which this soul was led, and said that the designs of God upon her were great ; that love and grace would do admirable things in her favour. She made them continue to try her, and spared her none of the fatigues of her condition, although aware that she was not accustomed to them ; for it was evident that the love of God and of her vocation alone gave her strength to go through them with so much fervour, silence, and fidelity that the whole community of Annecy was edified by it.

She once felt a slight emotion of anger because a postulant, her companion, had done something awkward in the kitchen ; she went instantly to accuse herself of it to her mistress, Sister Marie Etienne, who failed not to tell our two Mothers ; but they, seeing her so confused and ashamed of this little fault, considered it a proof of the sincerity of her virtue and of the purity of her soul, and were more and more persuaded that there was no pretence or hypocrisy in her conduct. It was evident on all occasions that she

refused nothing to grace, but everything to nature and self-love. Our venerated Foundress frequently advised her to confide entirely in God, and to content herself with having these truths alone present to her mind : *That this All was all for her, and that she was all His : that God had become ours by the Incarnation of the Word: that the love of the Father had given Him to us, and that she must be faithful to Him in the ways which He Himself taught her.* This holy Mother also said to her:—"Be not afraid of being mistaken ; a heart that trusts in God alone, that loves obedience, and never swerves from it, will always walk in the ways of God ; be submissive, then, in believing what you are told, and your life will be a happy one."

She practised great austerities without knowing that she ought to have permission to do so ; but she afterwards obtained leave often to wear a hair shirt, an iron girdle, and to take the discipline more frequently than the rule prescribes it. She added all that she could invent unnoticed, and often said to those who directed her that if she could be sensible of any pleasure, it would be that of finding means of showing God her fervent love, by doing some great thing for Him.

A year after her entrance she learnt the death of her virtuous mother with such resignation to the good pleasure of God that she did not shed a tear nor say a word of regret, though she had good reason to fear that her retirement had greatly contributed to this loss, so much had her mother been grieved by the

complaints of her relations at her having consented to it.

The whole community judged this postulant very worthy to receive the veil, and it was a proof of her great virtue that she was unanimously approved by a numerous Chapter, composed at that time of so many venerable aged Mothers. Her father, being informed of it, sent her eldest brother to try once more to bring her back to her home; this would have been a consolation and a happiness to all the family, who were in distress both at her absence and at the death of her good mother. Her brother also represented to her that she would dishonour them by taking the position of a servant; but she resisted, and said to him, with holy firmness, that there was nothing dishonourable in the house of God, and that it was too great a favour for her to be allowed any place at all in it. The Superior and the Sisters also expressed so much esteem and affection for his sister that he went away quite satisfied. They gave her a dowry of a thousand florins, and a great deal of fine linen and other apparel, which Mother de Châtel displayed to the community as something remarkable.

The project of the foundation of this Monastery of Turin being at that time again under discussion caused them to put off giving her the habit, because they wished her to go there as a postulant; and this was the only reason why she did not put it on till the 31st of May, 1637. She received it from the hands of our venerable Foundress and of our Mother de

Châtel, with interior sentiments so unusual and sublime that she herself was unable to express in writing the greatness of the esteem with which God inspired her for her religious vocation, and for the perfection of our manner of life. She redoubled her efforts to attain to the state of pure love; and her virtue gained her the esteem and affection of all the sisters, who found great consolation in conversing with her.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE IS CHOSEN BY OUR VENERABLE MOTHER DE CHANTAL FOR THE FOUNDATION OF THE MONASTERY OF TURIN—HER LABOURS IN THAT NEW HOUSE.

AT length, after a thousand difficulties and obstacles, our establishment in this town of Turin was happily completed, and this humble novice was one of the sisters chosen to be the foundation-stones of the holy building. On this occasion our Mother de Chantal said these memorable words:—"I have endeavoured, more than for any other foundation, to ask of God light to choose for that of Turin, which gives us the entrance into Italy, no subjects but those capable of taking into it the true spirit of our little Congregation. I hope that our Lord may have granted me this grace for them all, but I am sure I have obtained it with regard to Sister Jeanne Bénigne."

She, in fact, had no other desire on this occasion but by obedience to accomplish the designs of God for His glory, and to follow the Divine Word, who was sent into the world by His Heavenly Father. She uttered no word of opposition; she did not ask to see her relations before she went to such a distance, nor even to write to bid them farewell. Her only sacrifice, she said, was in leaving the tomb of her holy Founder, beside which she experienced so much unction; she remained by it for a long time before she set out, and had the consolation of making there secretly the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, until she should be able to make them publicly and for ever; and she received there a renewal of the graces that had been bestowed on her the first time she approached it.

Her heart felt also the quitting this first Monastery, but for no longer time than was required to make an act of conformity to the holy Will of God, which she had above all things at heart.

"My holy Father," she wrote, "then gave me the hope that I should help to bring and to maintain here the perfection of those maxims which I had seen so carefully practised in this holy Mother-house." All the sisters came to speak to her before she went, assuring her of their affection and esteem, and of the confidence they felt that she would be faithful in maintaining observance in the new house of Turin, and recommending her always to give her opinion to the Superiors and other persons against the introduction of

any novelty. She promised them to do so, and kept her word very faithfully, fulfilling it by her power with God, when she could not do it otherwise.

The 14th of September, 1638, was the day appointed for the departure of these holy missionaries. They were taken by the venerable Mother de Chantal, who felt a holy pleasure in observing the care that Sister Jeanne Bénigne took to give herself no satisfaction, keeping her veil so low that she could scarcely see the head of her horse. She received at every step new graces, holy thoughts about what she could not avoid seeing, and fresh lights on the subject of her mission.

The devil, envious of the peace of her soul, made efforts to disturb it, by representing to her the grief of her father when he should hear of her greater distance from him, but she repulsed all these temptations. One day that cruel enemy placed in front of her a phantom in the likeness of her little brother; her horse reared, and she was reluctant to urge it on, for fear of killing that little creature, but then remarking its exact resemblance to her young brother, she perceived the snare and passed on. In the evening she took an opportunity of asking the advice of our venerable Mother, who consoled and encouraged her, adding these words:—"My daughter, never make any account of the devices of our common enemy, he has no power over a soul that sincerely endeavours to give itself to the practice of true humility; I have myself by divine grace had too much experience of

his weakness not to be convinced of this consoling truth. Turn away from his suggestions peaceably but faithfully, and you will see that you will always be victorious."

They arrived on the 30th of September at Turin, where Jeanne Bénigne, with our holy Mother and the other sisters of the foundation, had the happiness of venerating the sacred relic of the holy Winding-sheet, that precious present made by Heaven to the royal house of Savoy. In the presence of that memorial of love, she found herself, as it were, surrounded and penetrated by the merits of the Precious Blood, with which it is stained and imbued. She felt plunged in that sea of mercy, so that it seemed to her a hardship to distract her from that excess of love by inviting her to kiss the sacred Winding-sheet, marked by the Wounds of her Spouse Jesus ; she did so, however, but in a transport of love, which would have wished, she said, not to have so many witnesses. She could not contain herself so as to prevent her Royal Highness the celebrated Christina of France, from observing it, and admiring also her modesty, which never allowed her to raise her eyes or to look at anything in that splendid Court. They all left the Court, and retired to their dwelling on the 1st of October.

When they reached it, our illustrious foundress, Madame Mathilde of Savoy, Marchioness of Pianessa, alighted the first from the carriage and took by the hand Sister Jeanne Bénigne, who said to her in her simple and respectful manner : " Madame, this is then

the place of our repose, where God will be glorified through the means of your Excellency?"

"Yes," answered the Princess, and made her enter the first into the choir, where she left her alone to go and meet our venerable Mother.

"It was at that happy moment," she said, "and before the altar recently raised to the Infinite Majesty, that I received a deluge of mercy and graces, with so complete a renewal of all those that had hitherto been granted me, that I was tempted to think the powerful goodness of God would exhaust itself upon me, not being able to imagine that after this it could still have other favours to bestow on my soul. I asked of God the grace to serve Him well, and to be henceforward so emptied of myself and of all creatures, that my Creator might possess me as He pleased, and I had the hope that my prayer was granted."

We find also in her memoirs relating to that time the following note:—"I was twenty-three years old when I arrived at this house of Turin. It was nearly three years since I had bid the last farewell to the world in order to live for God alone, by a spirit of death and of love; of love of God and death to myself, so that love should truly lead me to death, and this death to myself conduct me to the love of my God, in which I find the life that is sustained only by that supreme love."

Our holy Mother de Chantal, becoming more and more acquainted with the depths of this soul, found time every evening to speak with her, either to direct

her interior or to make known to her her own intentions and the way in which she was to act and to win the hearts of the people of this country. She also told her never to refuse to speak to the sisters who might go to her for consolation or to recommend themselves to her prayers.

Our great Foundress did scarcely anything without the advice of this humble novice; she consulted her about the purchase of this house, the first one being only provisional, for, as she met with powerful opposition, she wished to know her opinion, and the Will of God by her means. Jeanne assured her that the difficulties would cease, that she would obtain this house, that God would be glorified by it, and that Madame Royale would be consoled by the preservation of his Royal Highness Charles Emmanuel II. of glorious memory, in reward of the assistance she would afford her in that affair.

On the other hand, the devout novice was in admiration of the humility of our venerable Mother, who deigned to consult her little servant (these are her own words), and condescended to speak to her of many things in perfect confidence, sometimes even making her interior known to her. Our holy Foundress also taught her to reverse in everything the fashions of the world, making her do surprising things, even in the manner of preparing the food, adding, "My daughter, it is especially in the beginnings of houses established in great towns that we must accustom the sisters to religious poverty, to the simplicity of the

Gospel, to contempt of themselves and of the maxims of the world ; virtues which all emanate from true wisdom and lead to the knowledge of God."

The esteem in which Sister Jeanne Bénigne was held by all who saw her showed that God willed the greatness of His gifts to be revered in her person. Madame Royale took singular pleasure in conversing with her, and used to go into the kitchen to find her ; and, with a humility as deep as her rank was exalted, she waited on the sisters at table, and said to them, with the *gracefulness and majesty* with which that august daughter of Henry IV. did everything, " My sisters, eat with a good appetite ; you have a dispenser whose neatness is admirable." She learnt from Jeanne our customs in housekeeping, and admired the way in which our holy Founder had fixed the right proportion, and the exactitude with which it was observed. Sister Bénigne gave her whole attention to doing neither more nor less than had been taught her at Annecy, though our honoured Mother often told her to act freely as she might think fit, well knowing that whatever she did would be done reasonably, charitably, and, above all, religiously.

Madame Mathilde of Savoy, our foundress, continually showed great kindness to this humble novice ; and, as that princess had resolved to retire from the world, and to enter our first monastery of Annecy and live under the guidance of Mother de Chantal in the capacity of a lay-sister, she always called her her dear companion, and begged her to teach her the duties of

a good cook, finding also great interior consolation in conversing with her about God and the happy state of our holy vocation.

All the ladies of the Court and town who knew her looked upon her as a saint, and often came to recommend themselves to her prayers, never leaving her without their hearts being penetrated with devotion and holy affection.

But when we little thought of parting with our venerable Mother de Chantal, for she intended to remain here a whole year, the rumour that this town was to be besieged caused the first Monastery of Annecy to press her to return; she was, therefore, obliged to depart, leaving her heart, she said, with her dear daughters of Turin, and expressing a great desire to see our Institute extend itself as much in Italy as it had beyond the Alps.

Poor Sister Bénigne suffered much again on this occasion, being so suddenly separated from her who had, so to speak, taught her the true life of the soul. "Alas!" she said, "I did not weep, considering the Will of God alone in this arrangement, but I may say that my soul was separated from all that still even legitimately occupied it."

Her holy Mother spoke to her before she departed, assured her afresh of the truth of her graces, caressed her tenderly, and recommended herself to her prayers. She afterwards told Mother de Lucinge to consult with this good sister on all occasions, assuring her of her perfect capacity.

From that time forward Sister Bénigne had the whole charge of the household, and filled several offices at once ; though it was soon known through the lay-sisters that the difficulty she found in distracting herself to speak to them and guide them, fatigued her still more than when she had to do everything alone ; for she received from God supernatural strength sufficient for all the work, without ever losing her loving union with the Divine Spouse, acting in admirable peace and tranquillity, in imitation of that Incarnate Wisdom who reaches from pole to pole, and so sweetly disposes all things.

Her work sometimes obliged her to climb very high trees, and she went on to the very ends of the branches, so that the sisters who saw her were afraid she would have a bad fall ; and thereupon they took the liberty of asking our Mother de Lucinge to guard against it ; but she answered them, " My dear sisters, you need fear nothing for Sister Bénigne ; she has invisible aids who have orders not to let her fall."

She did indeed, during the siege, things that surpass belief ; she helped to make trenches in our enclosure, carrying earth, stones, and wood to strengthen the walls ; early in the morning she was the first to go the round of our enclosure to see what breaches the cannon had made, and to stop them with planks propped by beams which she handled as easily as if they had been little sticks. One evening some soldiers came in by one of the breaches to steal some linen that had been left to soak in a large reservoir of

water, and Sister Bénigne, who was upstairs alone while the sisters were saying Matins, heard a noise and went on to a balcony crying out, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, help us!" The thieves, thinking people were coming, ran away and left all the linen in the field.

The Superior warned her to take care of herself when both the batteries were playing, and our danger was greatest, and she quietly replied, "Mother, how many shots does your charity wish me to hear before I leave the garden where I am gathering what is wanted for the community?" That excellent mother, who was also visibly favoured and blessed by God, answered her, "Three, Sister." She obeyed without fail, so that when she happened to be at the farthest end of our enclosure, at the firing of the third shot, a dozen cannon-balls would fall at her feet or pass over her head, without the danger to her life causing her any fear, or even making her lose her profound recollection in God. She was not seen to tremble in the least on these occasions, but returned with a quiet step with her basket of fruit or vegetables, her eyes cast down, her face sweet and tranquil, in profound silence. Once the cannon carried away half the tree on which she was without her receiving any injury or fright; another time a ball passed through her kitchen, struck the fireplace and pierced another wall, without hurting her, or even throwing down or spoiling some pots of butter which were in its way. Another ball fell upon her bed and left no trace.

Divine Providence also wonderfully preserved and

multiplied all the little provisions that Jeanne Bénigne had laid up for the support of the community in the time of war; and nothing that was necessary or even useful was ever wanting.

In short our sisters said they had seen countless miracles worked in favour of this devout sister, who never omitted any of her prayers amid so many distractions and occupations, but on the contrary was more eager for them than a starving person is for bread. Our late virtuous Sister Péronne Marie Belin, who was often her aid, has many times related to me a number of facts similar to those we have briefly spoken of in this chapter. It will suffice to add that the same Sister Péronne Marie Belin often declared to me that she had seen her do such incredible and miraculous things, that she could not but consider her a real saint; for all that she did bore the mark of the blessing of God.

CHAPTER V.

HER PROFESSION—THE GRACES SHE RECEIVED WITH REGARD
TO HOLY IMAGES—CONTINUATION OF HER LABOURS.



HE was having prevented the Archbishop of Turin, Mgr. Antoine de Provane, from completing at Rome some of the formalities required for the establishment of this Monastery, the profession of the novices was obliged to be put off; but as soon as the answers arrived, that of the two novices who had come to the foundation was no longer

delayed. Our honoured Mother de Chantal, being more and more filled with esteem of her dear Bénigne, wrote from Annecy that she thought it fit she should receive the black veil, in order to make more use of the talent our Lord had given her for the service of the new house. But when the humble novice perceived this intention, she opposed it so strongly before God and before the sisters, that at last they yielded to her entreaties and received her as a lay-sister.

When they wished to prepare her for her sacrifice by some public mortification, according to the custom of the Order, her great virtue became evident, for they had difficulty in finding any subject of reproof, though they watched her very closely, there being nothing imperfect in her conduct; but at length as she had left some linen out in the rain that had been given for her use, they seized the occasion of this apparent negligence to make her be accused by the reader, and gave her the penance of carrying it for three days hanging round her neck. The Superior called her a waster of the property of the house, and at the same time ordered her to be put back to the A B C of the noviciate, where she had not been since her arrival here, because the Mother thought she no longer needed it. It was thus that the first Mothers strove to lay a good foundation in the souls of whose high perfection they formed the greatest hopes, by imposing on them the deepest possible humiliations.

Sister Bénigne then prepared to offer herself with extraordinary love as a perfect holocaust, and her

Divine Spouse aided her powerfully, by graces too extraordinary to be omitted here. She says in her memoirs :—

“It was shown me that by my profession my soul would receive a multiplication of favours, and a merciful participation in the perfections of my Lord Jesus Christ, the dear Spouse of my soul, as well as a larger share of the treasures of the Spirit of love; this same Love made known to me the different heights of the degrees of perfection by which He willed to lead me to sanctifying love, and the treasures of grace which are acquired by incessantly co-operating with that same grace, and by giving up everything to divine love.

“On the 10th of June, 1640, in pronouncing my vows, I was, as it were, taken up into the Bosom of the Godhead; I saw It occupied in operating great things in me, as in a nothing which God chose that He might form out of it an object worthy of His love, and fit to receive the delicate action of His mercy.

“The more I strove to humble myself at the sight of this nothingness, the more His Hand exalted it; the more I felt my own littleness, the farther I penetrated into the depths of the love of Him whom I was taking afresh to be the only object of mine.”

She made her profession with our honoured Sister Marie Philiberte de St. Innocent, who had also come to this foundation as a choir novice. They both had the honour of having for their godmother in this ceremony her Serene Highness the Infanta Catherine

of Savoy, who was more esteemed for her great virtue than for being the daughter of the great Charles Emmanuel I. and of Catherine of Austria, daughter of Philip II., King of Spain. This distinguished and humble Princess had a strong presentiment of the rare perfection to which Sister Jeanne Bénigne would attain ; she caressed her with especial affection, begging her to pray for her, for the needs of the State, and for all the royal house; and from that time she always called Bénigne and her illustrious companion, her daughters.

Bénigne writes again :—" After the day of my profession, I may say that I seemed to be no longer upon earth ; I saw God alone in all things, and I felt a special union with the Divine Word, my Holy Spouse, which is incomprehensible to human capacity."

She received so abundant an increase of graces from that Hand which is never opened but to do good, that one might say they were literally poured out upon that devout soul. She could not be distracted for an instant from a state of prayer which unceasingly attracted her towards the abyss of the Godhead. It was about this time that she received a singular grace regarding the large picture of the Holy Family which hangs over our altar in the choir. It was a present from Madame Méthilde, who loved our sisters as her spiritual daughters. She was always seeking to give them pleasure, and she wished to give a picture to each one ; but they begged her to have one painted for them all. There is a glory above, in the opening

of which is represented the Holy Trinity, and in the middle arc Jesus, Mary, and Joseph ; beside them St. Augustine and our holy Father St. Francis of Sales ; and below, in front, are our venerable Mother de Chantal and Madame Méthilde in the religious habit. When this picture was brought into the house the Mother and sisters each took one of these holy persons to honour. The Holy Infant Jesus fell to the lot of Sister Jeanne Bénigne, who was delighted that Jesus was her share. The adorable Infant, on His part, made her soul understand, by a thousand holy caresses, that He was hers, and that He willed her to take His place in the monastery, living in it like Him, subject to Mary His Mother.

“It is not in my power,” she said, “to express with what delight I approached that picture ; but once, on the 18th of March, being about to make my morning meditation before it, I saw a bright and beautiful light shed differently upon each person. I saw them all without confusion ; in ineffable beauty, which can only be called adorable and heavenly. But how can I express the divine pleasure I enjoyed at the sight of the immense brilliancy that I saw around the three Divine Persons, or say what I knew and understood by the impression of that grace, except that this single specimen of glory made me ardently wish to enjoy the entire possession of it, so that I could not afterwards cast my eyes on that picture without remaining half-absorbed in the Sovereign Being, and feeling a mortal anguish at living absent from my Love. My languor

was excessive, and I could not have endured it if love itself had not sustained me, representing to me the good pleasure of God. My ordinary ejaculation was, 'O God! when shall I possess Thee, and when shall I be possessed by Thee without any medium?' A voice often issued from it to instruct me, to animate and to correct me. It was on this picture that it was given me to see the glory which I believe my venerable Mother possesses in heaven. Her death, which took place on St. Lucy's day in 1641, was an irreparable loss to the Institute, and afflicted me beyond measure. I wept tenderly for that true mother of my soul, and I could not be consoled for that precious death but by adoring the designs of God, who willed to recompense her noble soul. Alas! if I were able to speak on this subject, how it would console you! Yes, my dear sisters, we are too happy in having had for our Mother and Foundress the incomparable and holy Mother de Chantal, who will pray much in heaven for her daughters."

All the graces she received with regard to this picture rendered her more than ever devout to holy images. She had already received very great graces at Annecy, in the chapel of the Holy Family, where she had twice had ecstasies that lasted two whole hours. This had given her great uneasiness, from the fear of having failed in obedience by having thus passed in prayer more than the usual time, and she had accused herself of it as of a considerable fault.

Another time, on looking accidentally at a crucifix,

she was instantly raised to a sight of the grandeur and holiness of the adorable crucifix, and inflamed with a deep sentiment of love and compassion. This was, she said, the first time she received the grace of an impression of the Holy Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; it was given her by rays of pure light, which she saw issuing from that Man of Sorrows, God dying for love. This favour was often repeated, with such intense pain that she could not have endured it without the supernatural strength that was given her.

These divine consolations were the flowers with which this spouse of Christ was surrounded, and they bore abundant fruit in her practice of virtue. After the wars were ended, the Mother and the sisters of this recently established house fell ill; and Sister Jeanne Bénigne alone was kept in health to wait upon them all, which she did night and day, with marvellous and unwearying charity, preparing their food and forgetting nothing that could be of use to them. Our Lord preserved the lives of them all, and even restored them soon to perfect health.

As soon as the Court returned, Madame Royale favoured this community with a visit, to thank them for their prayers. They went to meet her with the Cross, borne by our good Sister, and as the Princess hastened to embrace her, she nearly let it fall upon her, which made the august Princess say, "Sister Bénigne, without speaking to me, has made the Cross tell me, that in that sign of salvation I have found deliverance from my past tribulations." She

never came to see us without eating some of the dishes Sister Bénigne had made ready, finding them better than what were brought from her royal table. The Princesses, her daughters, did the same, and took pleasure in asking her for several things at a time, to try to make her be in a hurry, but that never happened, for she did everything in peace, and so well and in such order, that the servants of the royal kitchen left to her the care of arranging all the dinner, saying that she understood it well. Madame Royale said, "When I come here, I give orders to be magnificently supplied, that something may be left for my Sister Bénigne to regale her sisters with."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEGINNING OF HER SUFFERINGS—A VISION OF OUR HOLY FOUNDERS—THEY CURE HER OF AN ILLNESS—HER FORESIGHT OF THE CROSSES WHICH GOD DESTINED FOR HER—JESUS CHRIST MAKES HIMSELF HER TEACHER.



HIS chaste spouse who had up to this time been enjoying the sweetness of divine consolations, began to go down into the garden to gather the myrrh of many little tribulations. For the space of three years she was treated by her Love with great severity, abandoned to temptations and sufferings, so that she considered herself as nothing but a slave, deprived of all liberty but that of loving the Divine Hand which thus held her captive.

"In my prayer I was like a motionless statue," she

said, "with a feeling of submissive love at the sight of the servitude of Jesus with regard to His Father, adoring His designs upon Him. Following His example, I accepted His designs upon my own soul, fully disposed to satisfy His divine justice for the wrong done to His holiness by sin, and I accepted them as completely as it is in the power of a miserable creature to do. This sight of the servitude of the Incarnate Word kept my thoughts so fixed upon Jesus, that I could hardly for a moment turn them away from Him. This holy love bound me to Him with vehemence, and so closely that I was no longer free for a single moment in any of my faculties. I felt distinctly that it was a Divine Hand that was thus treating me, and without seeing it, it seemed to hold me as if by the hair on the edge of a precipice, from which I could not withdraw. And even in this I adored God, who kept me united to His Son, subject to His good pleasure and His will by love, not allowing me to think of my danger or my trouble, but willing me to be entirely abandoned to His designs. I think the strongest mind would have found it fatiguing to endure so irresistible an attraction.

"I saw that love united me to Jesus in order to deliver me over with Jesus to the justice of His Father. This love seemed to abandon me that I might feel more heavily the weight of this divine justice, whose equitable judgments and ever-merciful punishments I should neither have dared nor wished to avoid, for this strong love held me in subjection to His loving power."

It was about this time that she received from our holy Founders a spiritual grace, and a bodily cure which may be called miraculous, and which put her in a state of delight more like that of a soul in bliss than a mortal creature.

She had been suffering for nearly a year from sciatica, which she bore without mentioning it, or discontinuing her household labours, and in the first days of the annual retreat of the year 1644, this pain increased so much as almost to paralyse half her body. In the morning of the third day, being at prayer in choir, to which she had dragged herself with extreme difficulty, she suddenly saw before her our holy Father Francis of Sales, and our venerable Mother de Chantal, without having had recourse to them, or even thought of them. She describes it as follows:—"I understood in an instant that the venerable Mother said, in a spiritual language (for I heard no sound of words) to my holy Father, 'Behold the needs of this daughter.' Immediately I saw round them a light so beautiful and brilliant that I was enchanted with it, and I felt it surround me. That noble priest held in his hands a sort of shining vial; he approached and poured it over me; I instantly felt the sacred unction of that salutary oil, with a most beatific pleasure. I cannot express how I was penetrated by a grace so interior, so powerful, so efficient, and so full. This happiness lasted three whole days in all its first perfection, so that I passed them in an almost continual rapture in God, and in such a manner that I

could say with David, 'My very bones rejoice in the Lord.' My mind has never been able to comprehend all the value of this grace, except by the effect it produced both on my soul and on my body. When I came out of that rapture, I felt myself penetrated with a new and higher esteem for my holy Founders, all on fire with love of God, and more entirely submissive to His divine Will. I did not observe my cure till after the three days, but I believe it took place at the moment when my holy Father poured upon me the heavenly oil."

The following day, at the morning meditation, she was again raised above herself, to receive another kind of grace; love represented to her all the crosses that were destined for her during the whole course of her life, with the details of their extent, their number, and nature. This sight made her shudder, and filled her with such consternation that she underwent a sort of interior agony, which lasted nearly three hours; she sought for some help from the Superior and the Confessor, but found none, for they had both been made silent in her regard. Notwithstanding all her desire to be submissive to the divine good pleasure, she could not restrain the complaints of her miserable nature without uttering these sad words, "O God! to suffer all my life, and to end it on so rough a cross as that which my Love is preparing for me." That same Love reproved her severely for this thought of herself, which augmented her anguish; but at length the most Holy Virgin consoled her, saying, "My

daughter Bénigne must be submissive to the designs of my Son upon her, the least resistance is forbidden her." "I answered her," she writes, "only by a loving look, which clearly showed her my submission. After that I returned to the choir, which I had left to get a little breath in the garden, not even perceiving the heavy rain that was falling; I pronounced a great and perfect *Fiat voluntas tua*, and immediately my Love, the gentle Jesus, spoke these words of grace and salvation, saying, 'Yes, Bénigne, your crosses will last till the end of your life, which you will end like me upon the cross, after having followed me through all the steps of my Passion, in the midst of pains, humiliations, and abandonment.' As this sentence, severe as it was in itself, was followed by the assurance of the favour of the Son and of the protection of the Mother, especially in my last moments, I felt a torrent of graces and a profusion of infinite delights poured out upon me, so that I might say my whole soul was revived. My Divine Teacher afterwards introduced me in an especial manner into His sublime school, and led me as it were by the hand, giving me as much light to know the excellence of virtues and their most perfect acts, as He did to perceive and discern my smallest failings in perfection; all those that I committed were corrected by Love, but in terms of love, as it happened to me one day, when having asked the advice of my Superior, I did not follow it, for fear something might be wanting for the use of the community. I accused myself of the fault

in Chapter, as of a want of submission, but I had no rest, for I felt that there was still something imperfect in this matter which had displeased my Spouse. At last His interior voice made it known to me by this sacred reproach, 'Is this the way thou confidest in me? Have I not promised not to let thee be in want of anything? Thy fault deserves the privation of my sensible graces.' No more was required to humble me to the very centre of my nothingness.

"Another time we had a pig killed, and had left it hanging up whole in an open place that could be seen from the ramparts, for the enclosure walls were not yet raised, nor the monastery built. I got up directly to go and put it in a safe place, without being afraid of its weight, reckoning on the aid of the holy Angels. But our Lord said to me, 'Bénigne, return to bed and rest in My care.' I obeyed instantly; but in the morning I ran the first thing to see if it was still there, upon which my gentle Lord said to me, 'Ungrateful spouse, am I not powerful enough to keep my word with thee? What occasion hadst thou to doubt that I would watch over what gave thee uneasiness? Thou keepest thy heart too confined, I wish it to be enlarged and raised by love.' "

Lastly, her Divine Teacher commanded her to live as a stranger on the earth, giving heed to nothing that could interfere with her attaining to Him, and passing on from all created things to those that are heavenly and infinite.

CHAPTER VII.

HER HABIT OF SEEING GOD IN EVERYTHING—HER PURITY OF INTENTION—HER SENTIMENTS ON THE SUBJECT OF GRACE.

FROM the beginning of her religious life she accustomed herself to see God in her soul, and to lose sight of her own being, so that the Divine Majesty was more present to her than she was to herself. Here, as well as at Annecy, in order to try her, she was told not to keep her eyes so cast down as she usually did; but in all the objects that came before her eyes she saw God only, especially in her sisters; so that everything served to keep or to increase her recollection, and as all represented to her her Love, she adored and loved Him in all things. In after times, having reflected that this practice of beholding God in our sisters is a point of our rules, she was much consoled, and became still more attentive in observing it.

She declared that she had passed several years without taking sufficient notice of any imperfection in the sisters to remember it a moment afterwards, and consequently she never spoke to their disadvantage. Being reproved by her Superior for this as for a want of zeal, she owned that she had not observed anything imperfect in their conduct, for she looked at God only in their persons; that she believed herself destined to serve and console them, and not to watch for their failings. "I think," she said, "that our

Lord will say to them, as He does to me, to console me under the thought of my own, that His Cross will be our shadow. I hold these dear sisters in such high esteem, that I consider myself but as an atom beside them."

God alone thus occupied her always and in all places, even at the times of recreation, and in her most fatiguing and distracting household employments, and in everything God made her find something which attracted her to Him, and helped her progress in His holy love. The cellars were, above all, places of delight to her, where the Divine Spouse set in order charity in her, and where she often enjoyed the most holy union with Him. Thus she found God everywhere, and everywhere God found her disposed to receive His mercies, because she sought Him by loving Him with admirable purity of intention.

"Nothing is more pleasing to God," she said, "than this purity of intention; He has taught me that by taking care to direct all our actions well, we acquire facility in raising ourselves to Him, and that all our actions that are done for love, are like pure, beautiful, and burning flames, which rising from our heart, carry its affections to His adorable Bosom; and that He Himself, attracted by this love, comes to us, and to those for whom we pray to Him."

The following are some of the practices of this humble sister, which our Lord promised her should be profitable to those who should observe them.

1. "I usually say on beginning my actions, O my God, I offer Thee what I am going to do for Thy Beloved Son in the virtue of Thy Spirit, to Thy praise, to Thy eternal glory. Blessed for ever be the most august Trinity. Amen."

2. "At other times I intend to praise God and to honour Him by asking His aid and blessing upon all that I do."

3. "I believe that I love Him as it pleases Him by seeing Him alone in all that I do ; in consequence of which I can have no other aim in my actions than pure love."

4. "Again, I intend to praise God by offering my actions in thanksgiving for His graces, and for the solace they have been to me in my troubles."

5. "I intend to praise God by offering myself to Him for His sake alone, and urged only by love of Him."

6. "I believe that I praise God when I present to Him a will determined to do and to suffer whatever His goodness requires of me ; and all those who make this offering out of pure love, will praise Him as He wills."

7. "I hope that I praise God when I suffer any pain with joy and satisfaction, or any event contrary to my inclinations, and this solely out of pure love of Him, repeating on these occasions my offering of myself to Him for time and for eternity."

Her ordinary saying was, "All for God, all for His glory, and all through pure love." When this same love did not sufficiently occupy her, she repeated it often, sometimes adding, "I must remember that I

can labour for my salvation, that I ought to do it carefully, since my Love commands it in express terms, and has made it His own business, so important does He esteem it to His Father's glory, and so great is His love for us; but I add to this intention that of pure love, neither wishing nor desiring to be saved except that I may glorify and love God to all eternity."

In the time of the wars, and of the siege of which we have spoken, Jesus taught her the following prayers for herself and for all:

" BLESSED BE JESUS.

"O my God, all good and all powerful, who dost good to all, and still more to those who are pleasing to Thee, I beseech Thee to pour into my soul Thy superabundant grace, which may make me practise the virtue Thou most desirest in me for Thy glory and my salvation. I make the same request, O Jesus, for those whom Thou lovest, and who love Thee, fear Thee, and desire above all things to please Thee. O, my Lord! Thou canst make the wicked good, show them this mercy, and preserve the good in the goodness Thou hast imparted to them. Thou art all-powerful, and no one can oppose Thy Will; let it be Thy adorable Will, O Jesus, to do good to all; I beg this of Thee, by the love of Thy Heart, O Divine Lover of Thy creatures."

"O my Jesus, remain in me as in Thy temple,

since Thy Apostle teaches me that I live in Thee as Thy member, and since Thou didst come into the world to abolish the law of severity, establish in the whole universe that of Thy grace, and of Thy love."

"O God, I most humbly beseech Thee to give me Thy grace, Thy Spirit, and Thy love. Add to these also the fervent zeal which Thou inspirest, in order that, to Thy glory and that of Thy pure love, I may form and produce acts more pure, more prompt, more ardent, more frequent, more universal, and containing more of the perfection of that supreme love. Amen."

"I must always behold," she continues, "my nothingness and my weakness, and the power of His grace which never abandons me. Jesus often takes so prominent a place in my mind, and His plenitude so entirely fills my heart and the powers of my soul, that I can then do nothing else but keep my eyes fixed upon Him with a simple, loving look; the sight of my own unworthiness increases in me the effects of His grace, and enables me better to taste the sweetness of His divine mercies."

I have found in several places of her writings these words: "Oh! how great are the favours which God bestows on the soul which acts only to please Him, and considers nothing but the interests of His glory! I have known and felt the effects of this truth in my poor soul in the effusion of manifold graces; those

that I receive in my communions have often absorbed me in God, and reduced me to excesses of love. Then the grace of Jesus fills me completely, leaves no part empty, and suffers nothing to remain in me that is not wholly under subjection to pure love. It also teaches me that all that comes from God does homage to His Divine Majesty, and that it is itself an effect of His good pleasure for our sanctification, and an overflow of the adorable fecundity of His immense goodness.

“I was also told that grace does not inhabit a heart agitated by passions, when the heart itself is the cause of the disorder; that disquiet is a great obstacle to the operation of grace, and that in order to avoid this we must be faithful in seeing, hearing, and attending to things only as much as God wills and His service requires.

“This grace, the sovereign mistress of my soul, teaches me that in holy actions I must rest upon God, and not upon their merits; that self-love inclines to deceit and hypocrisy, but that these two faults cannot dwell with the Spirit of God. This same Spirit shows me that as He is a pure and simple Being, He gives with His grace and imprints upon the soul truth and simplicity; and that the words of our twenty-second Constitution, which say that we are to do everything in a spirit of profound, sincere, and frank humility, were written by our holy Father under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as a sure means of attaining to the possession of Him, and that the sisters who are faithful to this practice are well disposed to receive the influx

and sweetnesses of divine communications. The certainty that we are able to do nothing without grace, ought to nourish amply in our hearts this virtue of humility, which is also helped by the frequent consideration of our faults and of our being powerless to amend them without the aid of this same grace. We must not boast of what it causes us to do or to suffer, and if we must speak of that, we must do it truly, with modesty and humility.

“The grace of my God not only fixes my mind on Him, but makes me enjoy familiar conversation with Him, and, as it were, feel His sacred touch; this I can only express by saying that my soul almost sensibly experiences the fulness of God, and that this divine touch is grace itself, which becomes so pressing and so powerful that it unites the soul to God as perfectly as possible; so that one might say He makes His creature one with Himself by a bond of mercy and of love. Nothing but this divine love has the power to instil true virtues into the soul by the operation of grace, and my Spouse assures me that what I learn by these illustrations cannot be false.

“It is this love that keeps up the life of love and the vigour of grace in our hearts, and maintains the intercourse of love between God and ourselves; this fire, enlightening the understanding and animating the will, unites both to God, makes us love and observe His commandments and follow His counsels for His glory. This is what consoles my soul in the absence of that Object infinitely worthy of love, who commands

me to love Him. But what consolation has not my blessed Father St. Francis of Sales given me, by assuring me that in my condition of wayfarer here below, I may love God as much and even more than one of the blessed in their state of glory, and that my love may increase every moment of my suffering and mortal life, by the grace of my Jesus, so that my love may enable me to say these memorable words: My Beloved is all mine, and I am all His."

"I feel," she added, "that the unction of the grace of my Spouse, which is so beautiful and so pure, can console me in a moment; that it works marvellous changes in the heart which offers it no resistance, and that the duration of its effects convinces the soul of its truth, sometimes even without words, and when the soul does not comprehend the manifestation of this divine word, and still less its operation and supernatural impressions; I say, however, that this secret unction which diffuses itself in a moment over all the powers of the soul, is the highest of all divine favours, and as it were an essence of grace, and a concentration of all its effects.

"In this happy state, my soul can do nothing but adhere to God, without being subject to any disturbance, because this admirable unction, whose property it is to render God present, imparts to me a peace that may be called heavenly, and a very high esteem for grace and pure love, with the one and only desire to please Him by doing everything for Him.

“I must above all endeavour, by my own co-operation with the gifts of God, to make the soil of my heart, cultivated by the Divine Hand, render fertile the seed of His holy Word, drawing out well the juice and nourishment of that sweet grace, that it may bring forth fruits worthy to be offered to my Spouse. My only fear is that I should render that grace unfruitful in me, and that my Divine Husbandman should find nothing but thistles and briars in His field. But my Lord Jesus has said to me: *Ah, Bénigne ! I make briars produce roses, and the most barren mountains gold and diamonds ; yes, my daughter, hope and believe in me, my care of thee surpasses thy expectation, and out of firm confidence thou wilt obtain the carbuncle, the diamond, and the gold of true love, of solid hope, and the love that will correspond to my love. And although thou imaginest that by exerting thyself thou dost stir up the infection of all miseries, remember that I love thee, that where misery and poverty abound, there I pour out my mercy, and the riches of my grace, and that as I cannot abase myself to the unworthiness of thy soul, I raise it up to myself, freeing it from its dross and imperfection by means of my preventing love, and by that intercourse of reciprocal love of which I have told thee.*”

If I were to relate all that this holy soul wrote upon these subjects, it would form a whole volume, but since I must confine myself within moderate limits, I will be content with the little I have said ; it is quite sufficient to show the science which God

had imparted to this humble Sister ; whilst the delicacy, simplicity, and clearness with which she describes the heavenly favours bestowed upon her, are proofs of the authenticity as well as the holiness of her lights.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INSTRUCTIONS SHE RECEIVED FROM OUR LORD ON VARIOUS
POINTS OF PERFECTION.

O the interior sweetness which our Lord bestowed on this chosen soul, He often added the most sublime instructions on the ways by which He designed to lead her to perfection, and on what He required of her for this end to render her co-operation perfect. I should say, in the first instance, that these sacred counsels and precepts were given her by means of those interior words which are heard in the depths of the heart, and which, according to my poor discernment, may be called a light of faith. This imprints in a moment on our understanding, sacred characters by which the heart and the mind see, know, and love, almost at the same time, the beauty and the goodness of the divine truth that is placed before them, and which impart to the soul a substance as it were of grace, which gives it a prompt and easy comprehension of what God wills to make it understand, know and love, concerning Him and His Will.

I give here and have copied from her own notes a

small portion of these divine instructions which our Sister Jeanne Bénigne received ; they produced in her soul very efficacious effects of grace.

“I was often told that I must closely observe the movements of my heart, if I would gain a true knowledge of myself ; that in order to love God perfectly, we must make our love reign over our reason, and reason rule our inclinations and motions ; that the sublime illustrations and graces with which God favours me, cannot do me harm, because I do not seek them of myself ; for my Jesus told me in express terms that I receive them in obedience to Him, and because He wills that His divine perfections should raise me above myself, and that in that height I learn to know myself well ; that having nothing of my own but misery and inclination to evil, all the good that I have is from God, and the gift of His goodness. Being convinced of this truth, I know that humiliation is my due, I love it, I wish for it, and I willingly give leave to creatures to treat me as I deserve, that is, as being really nothingness : and when I am not able to rejoice in outrages, I ought at least to endure them patiently. I have, above all, been taught that the soul that lives in God, must die to itself every moment ; that it is but justice for one to die to everything who hopes to live eternally ; and we do not rightly die if we willingly enjoy a single pleasure of this life. Yes, Jesus has told me that to attain to this mystical death, which leads to the complete possession of divine love, I must often refuse myself the necessities of life ; that

true annihilation of self implies a total privation of pleasures, goods and honours, taken for their own sakes, and that it is through Him alone that we die to all that is in us, that is not of God or for God.

“Pure love teaches me that the liberty of the children of God makes them live in Him, freeing them from all bondage that they may be in subjection to His love through pure love; that Jesus alone possessed this perfect subjection with regard to His Father, and that no one except Himself and His Holy Mother truly knew the advantage there is in humbling oneself for God, because they alone knew what was the grandeur of the Most High for whom they abased themselves. Jesus and Mary have taught me that they both loved humility, out of the esteem in which they held that virtue; Jesus also told me that a soul that loves God perfectly fears nothing, in whatever state it may find itself, since God, who is its all, is with it. That a truly humble soul would even love its faults, if they did not offend God, because by humbling it, those faults show her that she must expect nothing but from God and from His grace, so that after having detested them because they are displeasing to our Lord and offend Him, that soul returns assiduously to Him, as to a refuge where it finds its happiness.”

“I retire,” said this dear soul, “by command of Jesus into the desert with Him to do penance, to Tabar to enjoy some glimpses of His glorious presence, to the Garden of Olives to share His sorrows and His loving Passion, to Galilee and Nazareth to

taste all the pleasures of pure love in the society of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph."

These were the delicious dwellings in the fields into which the Divine Lover led this His spouse, to speak to her heart alone without interruption; it was there that she was so marvellously taught everything.

"I must remember," she says in her notes, "that in holding loving colloquies with my Spouse, I must observe respect, that when I feel holy desires and good impulses without any preceding effort of my own, I must give Him fervent thanks, since He gives them to me of His own accord; as well as for the lights which come to me without taking pains and without words; then the soul should say, faithfully and humbly, Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth, and she should do so in reverential peace. My Jesus often tells me that the prayer of the heart is the best, and that it obtains all from God, because He grants the desires of those who take delight in Him, and since it is only through love that one can take delight in any object, and the Most High Majesty is my only love, I must be in subjection to Him and to all those whom He may command me to obey. He teaches me that His love alone is able to console a soul without any preceding cause; that it is the right of the Creator to take possession of His creature by a preventing grace, to change and fashion it at His pleasure, in His divine hands. He may be assisted in this by the creature, but He can be neither disturbed nor arrested by it, nor receive from it any wrong that can injure Him.

“I have often been given to see that the greater is made for the lesser, that for this reason God is for me, and that His grace is given me to restore my soul to its original perfection. Jesus taught me one day that the three nails which fastened Him to the Cross, sustain alone the order of grace, as God sustains the universe by His wisdom, power, and goodness, and is the glory of the blessed by His vision, His possession, and His love; that the perfection of the religious soul consists in the observance of the three vows; the vow of obedience crucifies its understanding and knowledge, that of chastity crucifies its heart through the senses, and that of poverty crucifies it by the privation of all it desires and of all perishable enjoyments. My Spouse tells me that nothing but obedience and love give a high value to our good actions, and that obedience confers merit even on indifferent ones. That all we do with little love is painful, and if the merit of it is not quite lost, it is at least much diminished.

“The greatest lesson that Love has given me is this, that, to be perfect, I must abandon myself wholly to Him, without any reserve, but by love alone, and for love alone; depriving myself of all my liberty, and making no other use of it than to give it to Him again and again, and to leave it at the disposal of His good pleasure. But this stripping of myself must be done with joy, because when I am thus destitute of everything, I possess God, and when I can no longer do anything by own choice, I am able happily to

know God, I can love God, I can be pleasing to God, I can enjoy Him, and I can do everything with the aid of the grace of my Jesus. Oh, what happy powers! My soul melts in considering their greatness and their extent."

I often found among her notes these words by themselves, *Power! Power! Power!* I asked her what they meant, and she answered me, "They express my admiration of what I think I am able to do, with the help of the grace and love of my God, and these words only, *to be able to love God*, raise me so forcibly above myself, that I cannot go on writing. This power is the dearest object of my gratitude towards the infinite goodness of God. I find inconceivable happiness in reflecting on this single truth, Bénigne has the power of loving God, and she is able to receive and contain Him in her inmost heart, by means of the Blessed Sacrament. I say that if there is any felicity to be enjoyed here below, it is only in this power which grace gives to man, of tasting the supreme delights of the merciful communication of God by the possession of His love. No, there is no good to be compared to the favour of God. Birds must fly from one place to another to be happy, fishes like to swim from sea to sea, but the heart finds its joy and its repose in God alone; it can only be rendered spiritual by raising itself above its material nature to unite itself to its sovereign Good.

"Our Lord gave me to understand the harm that every religious does to herself who leads a tepid

and unmarred life, because all negligence leads to dissipation of the grace of her vocation, and that dissipation to the loss, or at least to a great relaxation of the holy love of God; and, on the other hand, I understood that the faithful religious gains everything by mortification, because the more it takes away from us, the more we receive from God. After this, oh, how I wished to deprive myself of everything, but my holy Founders tell me that I please God by taking what is necessary, and even recreation; that the perfection of the daughters of the Visitation consists chiefly in a well-regulated interior, and in the solid practices of the true virtues of charity and humility. I must therefore confine myself to depriving myself of all that I can reasonably refuse to myself without contravening the intentions of our holy Founders."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIGHTS SHE DERIVED FROM SOME OF HER EXERCISES—
LAWS OF LOVE GIVEN HER BY LOVE.



WE have hitherto seen a part of the instructions which God was pleased Himself to give to His obedient disciple; we shall now see some of the lights He imparted to her by other means; for instance, by our holy writings, our religious observances, the chanting of the Psalms, her daily reading, &c.

She held in esteem all that is ordered or permitted by the Institute ; and our Lord has frequently said to her, Do what is done there, I am honoured by the practice of all that the Founders prescribed. This thought caused her ever to act in a transport of love. " O God !" she said, " to be able to glorify Thee by bowing my head to my sisters, because it is prescribed ; by picking a salad, because I do it by obedience ; by distributing apples to my sisters, because it is my office ; how great is the happiness of a religious who can enrich herself every moment with so many merits, since nothing is little that we do for God, and that is most perfect which we do by vow of obedience ; for nothing is more perfect or shows our love to God more than vows and the practice of them. I will therefore do all my actions, great and small, with interior attention and great love, and this love will render the great ones perfect, giving them the lustre which makes them pleasing to God, while it gives importance to the lesser ones ; yes, God tells me that the perfection of the daughters of the Visitation is all interior, like the beauty of the King's daughter. Oh ! how much honour and glory we give to God by the observance of all our rules, but above all by those which regard the love of God and charity towards our neighbour."

These two points of the rule often delighted her : *Let God be loved, and then our neighbours, and Honour God in the persons of each other.* The first and the third article of our Directory had the same effect on

her soul. "O Lord Jesus," she said, "what a happiness to be a daughter of Holy Mary, since all we do is to be done to unite us to God, and for His glory, and all our intentions are to be directed to the glorious end of pleasing God. To please God! Ah! what happiness! what a noble end! If we could well understand it we should be incomparably faithful in directing our intentions."

A great proof of her love of God was the high esteem in which she held that means of pleasing Him, doing everything for that sublime and holy end. Her Divine Lover told her one day that it was out of false humility that she had resisted taking the black veil which her Superiors wished to give her, since in whatever way we fail to follow His designs towards us, we fail to glorify Him, especially by that abandonment which He loves so much.

"Once in the annual Chapter," said this good Sister, "I saw all heaven attending to this action, and our Lord made me observe that our holy Founder appeared to feel the little imperfections, contrary to holy detachment, which some sisters committed by not sufficiently subduing their interior repugnance; but that he also experienced joy and knew the glory he received from the holy indifference of the others, who accepted everything as coming from the good Hand of God."

She had a great devotion also to the ordinary Chapters, and said that those sisters who assisted at them with respect and interior self-abasement,

always derived profit from them, and never came out without having received some grace.

It would be difficult for me to express what were the transports of the humble Bénigne, and the excesses of love which her heart experienced on hearing this verse of the Te Deum, *Pleni sunt cæli et terra majestatis gloriæ tuæ* ; it caused her to be for whole hours rapt in God.

“ One day,” she says, “ I asked my pure Love in what manner I could exalt that glory, and I received from Him this instruction : ‘ By being obedient to my graces, and by writing them down also by obedience ; yes, my Bénigne, submission attracts my glory to the soul, and that enables it to gain victories, as thy holy Founder teaches you all, and attracts me to the earth of your heart, which thus remains full and penetrated by me. My daughter, I am much glorified by all those who know how to conquer themselves, and who for love of me do violence to their passions, to bring them under the empire of holy love, and under the loving law of my Will. As for you, my Bénigne, think often of what I have done for your soul, and you will have great facility in overcoming all your imperfect inclinations.’ ”

“ Another time, on hearing those same words, I was rapt by God above my own capacity, and He taught me that by only approaching the Blessed Sacrament with respect and submission of ourselves, and all our will to His Divine good pleasure, with a tender confidence in His goodness, we should attract within

us that infinite Majesty and the glory which surrounds Him. He communicates Himself then to us almost in the same manner as He does to the Saints in Heaven ; I have over and over again experienced this truth."

Our Lord also taught her to give herself up with love to the impulses of grace, without making efforts to conform herself to the mysteries which the Church is celebrating at the time. On this subject she wrote these words: "My Spouse has assured me that I pleased Him by following the sentiments with which His love inspired me, and this consoled my grief for not being able sufficiently to compassionate and apply myself to the remembrance of His sufferings, especially one year when the mystery of the Incarnation fell on Good Friday. I was raised in God to a profound sense of the love of the Divine Word ; this took such complete possession of me that I lost the liberty of thought ; then I heard these interior words spoken in my heart by the Eternal Truth : *Bénigne, I love those who love me, and I desire only the love of my creature.* And at the moment that I was making the adoration of the Cross, He imposed silence on my whole being, to teach me that the act of love comprises all the acts of the other virtues, and the essence of all perfection.

"The same day I received a visit from my holy Founder and my venerable Foundress (they always come together to their unworthy daughter). They told me that by a single act of love made by their

daughter they are both more glorified than by all the austerities they could practise, because love is what is most pleasing to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“One day when I was repeating these words of the Paternoster: *Adveniat regnum tuum, fiat voluntas tua*, with tender earnestness, my Jesus said to me; ‘My kingdom is within thee, and my Will reigns there when thou possessest me with love and without uneasiness, reposing in the bosom of my fatherly guidance.’”

As she sometimes feared that she did not feel enough devotion in practising the community exercises, because she had more at other times, the Spouse said to her: “I keep no measure with Bénigne, all times are good to her, because at all times I possess her and favour her with profusion, without distinction of time or place, for my liberality towards her has no limit.”

She also wrote, “I have learnt that the sincere avowal of my powerlessness for good is a wonderful secret of love to please God, to draw Him to me and to restore me to my place near Him; that another secret is the abstaining from every word that may be ever so little annoying or superfluous; that to vex my neighbour is to disobey God, but that it is the most righteous charity to uphold and excuse my absent neighbour. Having once said some words less charitable than usual, I felt as it were a boiling liquid in my mouth after Holy Communion, and our Lord said to me, ‘I can leave nothing imperfect in thee without correcting and punishing it, as I leave none of thy least good actions without reward.’”

The Divine Love often instructed this dear spouse by means of the books which are given us by obedience every year ; He Himself marked the passages that would be of use to her with a golden cord. The first time this grace was given her, was with regard to the letters of our holy Founder. She said she had never opened those books, without that beautiful cord showing her the page she was to read, which was invariably a source of life and a treasure of graces to her.

At other times she found illumination and remarkable touches of grace in books which fell into her hands and which she opened accidentally. Thus, reading once that our Lord does not dwell in an impure heart, she felt some fear of forfeiting the promise He had made her that He would be habitually in hers, as in His garden of delights, seeing herself, she said, so full of the filth of sin ; but Jesus assured her that if that were true, His grace would cleanse all her impurities, since one moment suffices to do His work in a soul that co-operates with Him by love. "He does not will," she said, "that my fear should be excited by the pain of losing His gifts, but solely by the desire to please and satisfy Him ; I am forbidden to have any other motive than that of the glory of God and of His love. I must always keep myself with profound respect in the presence of God, and never have any other object before me than His Infinite Majesty.

"Love wills that I should be careful to let nothing

escape me that may be pleasing to Him ; He loves suffering, I must suffer even with joy ; I must not be content with depriving myself of all pleasure, I must let everything be taken away from me by His Divine Hand.

“ When my tribulations seem beyond my strength, I must remember that Jesus said, ‘ I am with him who suffers for love of me ;’ taking good care to do nothing unworthy of His presence. If I am faithful, my crosses, which must lead me to His Cross, will not diminish the ardour of His love in my heart ; on the contrary, my sufferings will augment it, for they are its food, for the very character of love is to do much and to endure much.

“ I must remember, Jesus said to me, that the soul which He prevents with His grace desires crosses, abjections, contempt, and that the most loving heart endures the most. He has often assured me that whoever attains to loving Him, is with Him, and suffers with Him because he loves Him.

“ The love of my God wills that I should beware of myself and of seeking my own interest, He wills me to receive with love all that He gives me in His loving-kindness. His secret voice has said to me several times, ‘ I will that thou shouldst attain to the most perfect state and to the highest perfection of love, so that thou mayest fulfil these words of thy Father, my Augustine : ‘ Love, and do what thou wilt ;’ and that the words of my Spirit should be verified in thee ; that the just man glorifies God in all that he deliberately does, inasmuch as he acts perfectly in all things.’ ”

The Eternal Father said to her by His interior voice, "I will that Bénigne should manifest my Name by writing down my divine favours; this is the law of love which I give her, and if she fulfils it, she shall receive my Spirit, she shall know my words, and understand them. He who keeps my law will abound in benignity, happiness, and long life. Let my Bénigne then be gentle, and let no impatience ever make her fail in this by herself or others." Jesus sometimes said to her, "Bénigne must suffer me to correct her, because I love her, for I am severe to my most dear spouses as long as they live. Bénigne must expect my divine mercy, Bénigne must confide in the love of Jesus, and believe in it. Bénigne must refuse nothing to pure love, Bénigne must receive what I give her without turning away from me, and she must above all know that the love of the Heart of Jesus requires a humble heart that knows how to suffer. She must every moment remember that love and union should keep the ear of her heart open to my divine words; that the tranquil soul is the seat of peace, and that this peace sustains, especially in Bénigne, the gifts and operations of my grace. This peace, which is a benefit that God alone can give, ought to be the joy of Bénigne; her heart possesses it, and the eye of love is upon her, to watch over her wants, since even her fear is peaceable."

"Bénigne," Jesus also said to her, "will be consoled in remembering me, and therefore she

should often speak of my munificent bounty. She should continually thank me for the perpetual miracle that I work in her, in giving her strength to bear my operations and the impressions of my grace. In short, I will that my Bénigne should never cease to love God, to hope in Him, to suffer with her Spouse, and to abandon herself to love. These are the four laws which divine love gives her."

CHAPTER X.

HER VISION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN—THE MIRACULOUS CURE SHE RECEIVES FROM HER.

WE have already seen that our Lord had made known to His humble servant by what a painful road He willed that she should reach Calvary with Him. This knowledge was afterwards often renewed in her, and was always accompanied by an increase of grace and strength to give herself up to it with more love and acquiescence, even when she was beginning to experience the illnesses which came upon her.

"No," she said, "I have not been unaware of the least circumstance of the rigorous way in which God designs to treat me. Alas! I know not how to explain my ills, because their origin is unknown to me; I only know that they come from the Heart and the grace of Jesus; that is all I can say about them."

My God wills me to suffer in my soul, in my heart, in my body, in all my being. I know that He has mercifully promised me glory, but on condition that I should share His cross. I know also that it will be composed of all sorts of matters; that I am to fashion it for myself by severe mortification; that God will permit creatures also to make it for me, and that He Himself prepares this cross for me by the vehement desire that He gives me of pains and sufferings."

In the month of August, 1647, our Lord favoured His spouse with a violent illness which nearly carried her off; the physicians owned that they did not understand it at all, and their remedies, far from relieving her, increased her sufferings. Being interiorly moved to desire her recovery, and to ask health of God, she one day tried to kneel upon her bed; but remembering that she had not the permission of her Superior to make this request, she instantly returned to her usual position. During two days she still suffered terribly, but on the twelfth of that month, towards noon, she suddenly felt herself seized by the Spirit of God, and rapt in Him by an entire suspension of her faculties and senses; her soul was as it were transported into heaven to enjoy the sight of the most Holy Virgin on her throne of glory. "O God! who can relate," she says, "the beauty and the grandeur of that incomparable Queen! It is such that the sight of it alone is enough to render a soul blessed, and I am not afraid of asserting

that nothing that has ever been said of the glory enjoyed by that sovereign Queen of Heaven comes even near to what I have seen of it ; so that the little sight of it which was granted me took away all the pleasure I used to have before in hearing her praises proclaimed, so low and unworthy has the human expression of them seemed to me since then. It is not too much to say that even on the subject of the Blessed Virgin alone, St. Paul was right in saying that the heart of man cannot comprehend what pleasure and glory God has prepared for us above, because the mere sight of Mary glorified is a happiness which cannot be understood. I saw around that august Empress an infinite number of Saints, who were as if comprised in an immense globe of light surrounding Mary, and gave her manifold praises ; and I thought in my transport that these souls were like so many Queens of Saba praising the incomparable Mother of the immortal Solomon in this heavenly Jerusalem. One of her looks, one of her movements so increased the brilliancy of the light in which I saw her, that this light came even to me and surrounded me. Once this glorious Mother of the Redeemer seemed to me to rise, and with respectful but loving majesty to adore some object which it was not given me to see, because it was as it were surrounded and hidden in a luminous obscurity, the splendour of which could not be borne by the strongest eyes ; the reflection of it which fell upon me filled me with such ineffable pleasure and such sweet unction

that I lost myself, so to speak, in that sweetness. It was made known to me, but in a way that cannot be felt by the senses, nor be understood by my own intellect, nor described by the most elevated, learned, and refined human words, that the infinite Object which I did not see was the Divinity. O God! what was this knowledge like!!! It would be to lower it too much, even to conceive the idea of speaking of it, so that silence is the best way of expressing the quality and greatness of such mercies; indeed I did not perceive that in that sublime place anything was expressed otherwise than by such silent language, which enables me still better to conceive its holiness and glorious majesty.

"That Sovereign Queen of the heavenly kingdom afterwards asked of her Son Jesus my cure and the prolongation of my life, which was immediately granted to her; but it was only on the day of her glorious Assumption that, having returned to my senses, I found myself entirely cured and able to rise.

"I should also say that when this Divine Mother asked of God my health I remarked that she showed an enchanting beauty; this impressed on me so great a contempt of all that is most charming in this world that I have never since felt or seen anything that has seemed agreeable to me, or given me even a shadow of pleasure, so that this favour rendered me insensible to all created things. This vision inspired me, moreover, with very great confidence in the powerful pro-

tection of the Mother of love, having perceived how great is its efficacy, by the promptitude with which I saw the prayer was granted that she deigned to make for me, insomuch that one might have said she had commanded rather than besought.

“ Our Lord once ordered me to speak of this pure Virgin, that she might be honoured ; I took the liberty of replying, ‘ Alas ! Lord, what can I say that can approach the grace and glory she possesses ? ’ My Divine Saviour answered me, ‘ *Say what thou hast seen of it.* ’ This was spoken in my heart by those interior words, sweeter than honey, which prove to me that it is truly the voice of my Spouse, whose lips distil grace by the impression of peace which they leave in the soul. I will say then, O Jesus, that I have seen Thy Mother triumphant in the height of her glory upon a throne placed above the choir of Angels, and that all is below her which is not God or Jesus ; that from the marvellous and incomprehensible height of Thy glory Thou dost look upon her as the object of Thy delight, and that she composes part of the happiness of all the blessed.

“ Furthermore, Thy poor creature must own that she learnt that the sublime greatness of Mary and the height of her triumph are based upon the abyss of her humility. Yes ; it is humility that has made her the Mother of God, and it is also humility that raises her above all the Saints, and even the Seraphim.

“ In conclusion, I think I may assert that the glory of Mary cannot be conceived here below by any crea-

ture still living in a mortal body, and that it would suffice to beatify the Saints, if God, who is their essential beatitude, were not known to them."

But, as we have already seen, the way of Jeanne Bénigne was to be a way of sufferings. One day, when she was speaking to her Divine Spouse of her crosses, he answered her, "Do not amuse thyself by distinguishing or counting them; the decree is passed; they will last till thou comest to me in glory, but my Holy Mother will assist thee; she will be around thy death-bed to receive thy last sigh, as she was at the foot of my cross."

Two years had scarcely passed when Bénigne was again attacked by a complication of maladies so various and so terrible that the doctors had no hope of curing her. Though remedies were of no use they did not fail to apply many, which seemed rather to satisfy her love of suffering than to give her any relief. She had a young infirmarian who much esteemed her virtue, but who wished to have fresh proofs of it, so that she took pleasure in trying her unalterable patience. To relieve her in the cold fit of the fever she loaded her with coverings, and then went away to the others, while the poor patient durst not say a word nor uncover herself ever so little when heat came on. The infirmarian on her return would uncover her and ask her if she was not very thirsty, without giving her to drink for a long time after. But this Sister, being more dead to herself by mortification than dying of illness, never allowed herself to say a single word of

the way she was treated, which was indeed a strange way. She almost always kept profound silence, and did not even express her wants.

The Divine Lover took care of His spouse in an admirable manner. He caused her to be visited by the Princes of the Apostles, who assured her that this sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of Jesus, who did not retract the favour He had granted her by means of His most Holy Mother two years before. These two great Saints appeared to her several times, calling her the spouse of Jesus, their Divine Master.

But it must not be supposed that the sight of these two Saints, any more than so many other visions with which this chosen soul was favoured, were merely imaginary, or the effect of fancy; for that would not leave the impression of grace, of sacred unction and divine peace which Bénigne felt, nor the vivid, calm, and permanent impression of these favours, which remained in her for a long time after she had received them.

If it were permitted to a simple religious to judge and to speak of so high a matter, I should say that it is a certain pure image, beyond all bodily shapes, which grace shows to the understanding to conceive it, and to the will to excite its love; and that the soul receives in a supernatural way the faculty of seeing and loving at the same time, without any other medium or matter than that pure image which grace and love imprint rather than form in the soul, which

I think may be called a species of representation and participation in what will take place in us in the state of glory before the resurrection of the body, when we shall enjoy the blissful vision, not only of the Saints, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the sacred Humanity of Jesus, but also that of the Divine Essence; with this difference, however, that in heaven these pure images will be always present, and that here below they pass away, and only leave their impression and remembrance in the mind.

Let us return to our patient. Her Divine Spouse had sent her another Angel to be with her till her last end, and to appear to her under a visible form in the manner we have said, as well as her guardian Angel; so that the bed of this devout Sister was at once a cross, because of the torments she endured on it, and a paradise by the heavenly consolations she received. She took no heed of her illness nor of her bodily wants, being persuaded that, as she was a victim of love, everything should contribute to make her suffer.

It was about this time that I had the honour of entering this convent, and being ill for a few days, I was placed in the infirmary in a bed near to hers, so that I had the opportunity of admiring her patience and angelic sweetness, and of being wonderfully consoled and excited to esteem my vocation by the kind intercourse she held with me; and this was remarked as being extraordinary, for she hardly ever spoke at that time. She has since told me that our Lord then renewed in her the knowledge He had given her

the first time she saw me in my nurse's arms, of the choice He had made of me, miserable as I am, to publish His mercies towards her. In our conversations, she told me almost all that I have said of her life in the world, and of her first coming into religion ; and she confided to me also the wonderful secret, that grace rendered her incessantly attentive to the presence of God.

Thus I derived great spiritual benefit from a slight illness ; and I was also able to be of some use to this good patient by saying a few words to the doctors which made them pay more attention to the means of curing her. One of them at last recognised the depth of grace that was in her, and said openly that she ought to be preserved as a treasure, declaring that her illness was supernatural, and could be cured by God alone, which in fact took place.

This is what she said on the subject of that illness :
“ I could not have the happiness of communicating during all my illness, but I was so filled and penetrated by God, so caressed by my holy Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, and by my holy Angels, that I thought myself already in heaven, except that I had the honour of suffering, which is the only good that one has not in paradise.”

CHAPTER XI.

CONTINUATION OF HER SUFFERINGS—HER AUSTERITIES.

HER pains left our Sister Jeanne Bénigne a short interval of ease, and then the Divine Spouse was pleased to place her once more in a state of pure suffering. Her pains became numberless and unaccountable; they began by general rheumatism and a sort of convulsions which at times contracted her into a ball, and made her as stiff as if her limbs had been tightly bound. In spite of all, she never ceased working, suffering like a martyr without complaining or seeking to be pitied, without asking for relief, living in holy joy and crying out sometimes, "I am transported when my bodily pains are united to those of my mind; and although they seem sometimes intolerable to the human frame, I feel an exceeding pleasure in uniting myself to the designs of God in my sufferings, and I consent with all my heart to His executing them as He wills. Oh, what a happiness! to satisfy Jesus at my own expense, by the favour He grants me of suffering in my whole being."

To all the rest were added terrible inflammations of her eyes, ears, and teeth; excessive swellings of her head and legs, so painful that she might justly be called a soul in purgatory. Her pains did not succeed each other, but usually attacked her all at once, so that she

called Divine Love the beloved tyrant of her life. Her face was sometimes of a frightful green colour, yellow, or black and brown ; this colour changed according to the causes for which she suffered. Afterwards she would be fiery red and almost radiant ; then, she said, it was love tormenting her by excesses of love and by the desire of fresh sufferings ; and this love and these desires were so violent that she was carried away beyond herself, crying out in solitary places, " Love, love ! sufferings, sufferings ! Oh, what favour can equal that of suffering for God ! Ah, dear creatures of my Divine Beginning, give me new means of suffering, have pity, pity on the spouse of a crucified Love ! For love's sake contribute to tyrannise over her."

" But alas ! nothing satisfied my ardour better than my Divine Lover ; a single impression of His pains abundantly sufficed to content me, and brought my suffering to its height, especially when in this state I said to Him, O my God, accomplish Thy Will in me ; burn, cut, break, annihilate Bénigne. My Love then showered pains and torments on my whole being, to satiate me with that bread of suffering so grateful to my taste by the effect of His grace. I was never better fed with it than when pure Love made me satisfy divine justice for some sins ; I should have died of it many times if the divine goodness had not sustained me. Love is often pleased to let me fall into a swoon and remain as if without life, and on these occasions He says to me, ' Well, poor spouse of Jesus, art thou satisfied ? ' Then out of weakness I find strength to

assure Him that if He would please me, He must renew his painful favours."

Thus this loving soul assured her Spouse that the waters of tribulation did not extinguish the ardour of her charity, nor diminish her hunger for that food of the strong. She was sometimes attacked by a violent pain in the throat, with spasms of the heart, which reduced her to the point of death ; her Divine Spouse then said to her in His exceeding mercy : " Does my Bénigne wish to die ? " " I only answered," she said, " to this sacred kindness by a loving look, giving myself up to His Will ; but sometimes the Beloved of my soul wills that I should explain myself, and that I should myself ask to live, saying to Him : My Jesus, Thy poor Bénigne wishes still to live and suffer. From that moment I feel recovered. In that state I seem almost exhausted, and remain with scarcely a perceptible breath of life ; but the holy familiarity with which God treats me is well able to support me, and to restore my strength without human succour, which I never seek on these occasions."

One would have said sometimes that this good Sister was on fire, and at other times that she was frozen ; for everything was in excess with her ; she seemed to pass from death to life, from extreme weakness to a miraculous strength, which caused her to recover by herself under the Hand of God, that she might again undergo these painful operations. On one of these occasions our Lord told her that there were few souls on whom He had bestowed such great

graces. "Then," she said, "as my ingratitude came into my mind, I felt a transport of zeal that God should avenge upon me the sins of all mankind, and I should have thought it a favour to be cut to pieces; for I was given so vehement a desire of suffering, that the inability to appease it was more difficult for me to bear than any other pain."

She sought, indeed, for every means of satisfying divine justice by numerous and severe penances in expiation of the sins that were committed, especially in the many wars which afflicted Europe, and of which a great part were felt in Piedmont. She was often transported to the very places, to witness the disorders that were committed, and knew more about them than even the persons concerned. Then God excited her to ask for pardon and peace for those nations by these interior words: "Bénigne, oh, tell me to pacify these kings, and to cease to punish them by means of themselves." "But who can express," said this humble Sister, "to what a state of annihilation I was reduced by this Divine kindness, which rendered the great God as it were dependent on His unworthy creature; confusion cast me into the deepest abyss, and love raised me to the highest heaven, there to adore that infinite Goodness in its source."

"At other times feeling myself devoured by zeal for the honour of God, I cried out, 'O my God, avenge Thyself on Thy creatures!' but love and charity made me say directly after, 'No, no, O sovereign clemency, Heart of Jesus, pardon all the world and punish only

Bénigne ; let her bear the chastisements that are due to it.' ”

She sometimes imitated the holy folly of the cross and of love, practised by the great St. Paul, offering herself to death to procure for her Christian brethren the honour of belonging to God and to his Son Jesus Christ. For that end she would have exposed herself to all the torments of the martyrs, and even to the loss of what was most precious to her, the vision of our Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of His divine presence, in order to obtain pardon for her dear neighbour, and that the whole world might have the grace to know God, to love Him and enjoy Him.

O Divine Love, why dost not Thou give me the pen of the Seraphim to enable me to express the admirable desires of suffering that Thou gavest to this angelic soul, and the way in which Thou didst fulfil them ! If Thou wouldst grant me that favour, I might hope to inspire all the world with respect and veneration for this holy soul, and thus to increase the glory of God, by the progress that every heart would make in holy love, on seeing what Thine did for her, and how wonderfully she corresponded to Thy grace.

Her love was not satisfied with the illness and sufferings assigned to her by God, therefore she procured a number of others for herself, as we shall see by the recital of her austerities. She speaks in her writings in this manner : “ I entered religion only to become holy, and to consume my own being to the honour of God, and the glory of His love ; wherefore

I never, that I can remember, granted the slightest pleasure to my senses, at least voluntarily. I destroy myself as much as I can ; I have passed thirty years in such disgust of food that the table was a place of torment to me, and during the time that my employments kept me out of sight of my sisters, I was often two days together without swallowing anything, not even a drop of water, and without thinking of doing so, for my occupation with God left me scarcely any leisure. I sleep little, and I do not give heed to the pleasure which repose might give to my body that is fatigued in every way, not allowing myself to lie in an easy position in my bed. I hardly even allowed myself to sigh a little, to recover myself, on coming out from prayer, till I was ordered to do it by obedience."

She was, indeed, inexorable towards herself, and never gave herself the slightest indulgence, but always followed her usual course ; never failing to rise with the community though she was generally the last to retire in the evening.

When I met her dragging herself along with the help of a stick, and asked her how she was, she seemed to awake from a deep sleep, and smiling pleasantly she would say, " Does your charity want anything ?" or else, " Do not you pray for me, Sister ?" It was thus that she made known her painful state. At the end of her long and torturing sufferings, her Angels usually excited her to resume her penances ; that of the discipline was her most frequent and daily one ; she took it at night for whole hours, and she was encouraged in

this by her two faithful guardians, who by the command of God named to her the sins of the persons for whom she satisfied by this mortification. When her Divine Spouse required it of her, she used to go at night into the garden and throw herself into a bed of nettles and roll upon them as if they had been roses; then she scourged herself to blood with osier rods, and afterwards with iron chains. In this loving ingenuity she also made use of little bundles of thorny gooseberry branches, with which she very often beat herself, so that her blood mingled with the dew or the frost, according to the season.

Her love increased her attraction to penance, and her penances exciting her love, made her find out constantly new modes of tormenting herself. There were in the garden many very large thistles, and she used to press against their thorny knobs, passing through them repeatedly, till her skin was all torn; then she would retire to the cellars, where, under favour of the darkness and silence, she renewed all her wounds with iron instruments. From these excessive penances she often passed into heavenly raptures, in which she received ineffable sweetness; then returning to herself, she resumed the hour's discipline, in the ordinary manner, not reckoning the others as such, but calling them her little follies. When all this was ended, she went to take a little repose. "O my God," she said, "what could my love have done to give some little vent to the desire of penance that He gives me, if He had not suggested to me all these ways of tormenting myself?"

Without that how could I have satisfied divine justice, and my hatred of my body ? which is so great that I can only bear with it in consideration of its being capable of suffering the bad treatment I inflict upon it, in order to punish in it the sins committed by so many creatures through their senses, and from which the grace of God has preserved me. What a pleasure to satisfy God at my expense ! My sinful soul has indeed made my body undergo without exception all those holy follies which so many innocent souls have been inspired to practise ; but the wretch is so accustomed to all the torments I inflict upon it, that it is now hardly sensible of them ; most commonly the interior attraction of my love for God lets me feel nothing ; and then long disciplines only serve as dainty morsels to the palate of that love whose hunger cannot be satiated."

She took several disciplines every day, one following another, she thinking in her simplicity she had permission for them all ; " for," she said, " our venerable Mother de Chantal had desired our Mother de Lucinge to be a little more liberal with me than with the others, knowing how much I stood in need of penance."

But the way she had obtained all these permissions was this ; she asked leave to take some extra disciplines for such and such intentions, and in granting it, it was supposed that she would unite them together, but she kept them all separate. At other times she asked to do some little follies of penance, for all she could do for God seemed nothing to her ; she obtained this also,

and thus she could practise all that we have described. But in process of time she had to explain the kind and number of her austerities, and after wise and mature consideration she was allowed many extraordinary ones, for it was evident that God willed to be singularly honoured by this soul, on whom He bestowed such distinguished graces.

Our first Mother took the advice on this subject of our beloved Mothers de Blonay and de Chaugy, who were successively Superiors of our holy Mother-house; and they were of opinion that as it is rare to meet with persons of such exalted virtue, it would not be against our rule to permit this Sister to exceed the common practice, since there was nothing common about her, but everything in her was beyond what was ordinary, or even natural. Several religious Fathers confirmed this opinion, and she was given liberty to satisfy the fervour of her love, on condition of keeping within certain prescribed limits.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ASSAULTS WHICH GOD PERMITTED THE DEVIL TO MAKE
UPON HER—THE VICTORIES SHE GAINED OVER THAT ENEMY.



HE Divine Lover took such pleasure in the sufferings of His spouse, that He furnished her with a new source of them, and announced to her one morning, after having fed her with

Himself, that the devil was horribly enraged against her, and that for his confusion he would be allowed to make a furious attack upon her; that she must be upon her guard, and that the evil spirit would endeavour to make her fall into such and such faults. The sweet Saviour added: "Fear not, my daughter, I shall come to thy assistance, and be assured that Satan is never permitted to reach the highest part of the soul; this redoubles his fury. He will gather up his forces to disturb thy imagination and to hurt thy body, but in this, also, I will limit his efforts, as well as in his attempts to raise up contradictions on the part of every creature against thee; the consequences of this and its remedies will cause thee some trouble. I shall then conceal from thee the pleasure I take in seeing thee fight against my enemy; yes, Bénigne, I shall be in thee in a singular manner."

She exclaimed without knowing what she said: "*Libera me, Domine, et pone me juxta te, et cujusvis manus pugnet contra me.*" In that very moment she learnt that God designed to make her honour towards the end of her life, the dereliction of Jesus on the Cross: that she would be in such desolation, that she would believe herself to be almost abandoned by Him, and that then the devil would the most strenuously endeavour to overcome her.

Once God said to her: "Fear nothing; love guides thy steps; I tell thee again that my eyes are upon thee."

It is now time to relate how that wicked spirit, in his

jealousy of the human race, and especially of chosen souls, began to torment this humble Sister, making use of the liberty he had obtained from Him who chained him to the foot of His Cross. He attempted several times to kill her, beating her violently, and hurting her in various ways. When she went into the cellars, he tried to terrify her by showing her horrible beasts running over the barrels, as if to throw them down, or jumping upon her to strangle her. But fortified by grace, she feared nothing, and conquered that proud one by thoughts of contempt of herself, of confidence in the power of Jesus Christ, and of the powerlessness of that rebel. Another time he tried to disturb her by cutting open the barrels and throwing everything into disorder in her store-room ; but he never was able to spoil anything, nor to spill a single drop of wine. Her good Angels warned her of these little attempts, as soon as she was free from her pressing occupations, saying to her, " Sister Bénigne, go and remedy the mischief that was meant to be done to you ; it is not known that we have orders to watch over all that is under your care." They even wakened her in the middle of the night ; and this vigilant spouse would rise without hesitation and go where she was wanted. Those holy guardians used also to say to her, " Receive this vexation with submission to God, who permits it ; we could easily remedy it ourselves, but you must, by this mortification of quitting your bed and your rest, do great despite to that enemy of God." When she was alone in those solitary places

she increased his anger, by taking those terrible disciplines of which we have spoken. This made the devil furious, and he roared like a lion in some corner, especially when she exclaimed, "O my God, it is to satisfy for such and such sins which the devils have caused to be committed to-day against thy Divine Majesty, that I strike my body thus. At that moment," she said, "I received a strength which seemed to me supernatural, that I might be able to continue this penance longer and more violently."

She often says in her writings, "Alas! while I was walking between my two Angels, enjoying their visible presence, I was at the same time sadly afflicted by the sight of the devils, who kept near me in the form of hideous little monsters, doing horrible things and crying, 'We will make thee perish, we will make thee sin.' They sometimes followed me for whole days; they left me only in the choir, where they could not enter, for my two Angels usually chained them at the gate; but when I came out from that place of refuge I met them again more enraged than ever. Their most severe treatment of me was on the night of the 26th of August, 1672, when the lightning struck our monastery. They struck my head with great violence while I was on my knees praying to Jesus that the storm might not hurt the sisters nor the house; the pain was so great that I thought my brain was crushed and our cell destroyed; but in a moment I found nothing was hurt. These words alone: 'Bénigne

trusts in her all-powerful God' deprived the demon of all power to hurt me."

"Once only," she says in her notes, "I believe I saw him with my bodily eyes. He was in a corner of the choir, under the form of a hermit pretending to be devout; he held in his hand a large sheet of paper, on which my sins were confusedly written; and while he presented it to me that I might read them, the Sister portress came to call me to give her the daily alms for the poor. At that instant I perceived the trick, by the slight uneasiness I felt on his disappearing, when I went away. On reaching the kitchen, I made a sign to the portress to take the broth prepared for the members of Jesus Christ, but she made a mistake, and took a pan in which some bran was boiling for cleaning the dishes." The moment Sister Bénigne found out the mistake, she ran to the gate with the good broth, quite grieved not to have herself served the poor of Jesus. She wanted to take away the bran-water, but all the poor people declared they had never tasted anything better. As she insisted on having the remains of the bad broth, one of the beggars gave her his wooden porringer filled with it. She went to the refectory transported with love for our Lord, and confused at having served Him so ill in the persons of His poor; and then she swallowed all that mess. This is what she said of it: "I found it so good that neither before nor since have I tasted anything like it. I received in it so exquisite and extraordinary a nourishment that I was wonderfully

supported by it." She had so vivid an impression that it was something left by Jesus, that we may say it was to her that divine food of faith which nourishes the just. All the sisters who witnessed this action of Sister Bénigne have often assured me that all the rest of the day she appeared rapt in God, and with so radiant and beautiful a countenance that she seemed to them a person come down from heaven.

The implacable enemy of the human race was never weary of tormenting this faithful soul, who by her prayers snatched so many out of his hands. She used to speak in admirable terms of the happiness of being able to save a soul from the power of the devil, and of the incomprehensible joy caused her by several graces of this sort bestowed on her by our Lord. She also said that this malignant spirit has scarcely any power over the daughters of the Visitation, and that he will always be easily overcome by those who strive with all their might to acquire the perfection of divine love, and to live in the sincere humility and sweet simplicity of the children of Jesus Christ. But she knew that he makes great efforts to cause us to fall by want of union, and by our little esteem of each other. "Oh! how great a misfortune would it be," exclaimed this faithful spouse of Jesus, "for the daughters of our holy Father Francis of Sales, to pay ever so little attention to the suggestions of the enemy in this matter; however slight may be the failing that will follow, it will immediately hinder much good in the Institute. The esteem and love of our first

Mothers and sisters for each other was most admirable and consoling. God has made known to me that it was by this means that they drew down so many blessings on themselves, and above all, the wonderful propagation of our Institute in so short a time." She took especial care never to fail in this point herself, perceiving the slightest fault against it which she might fall into.

"In short," she said, "let us give the devil no hold over us, nor occasion to boast of having gained any advantages over the daughters of Holy Mary. Ah! I well know that disunion is the bane of the human race, and especially of Christians. Alas! if people could see, as I am very often shown, what the devil gains by the miserable political reasons which disunite Christian princes, there would assuredly be no more of these dissensions; and if discord were but once at an end between them, there would no longer be any kingdoms which would not be equally submissive to the Church and to their rulers. But while the children of that beloved spouse of Jesus Christ mutually rend each other, there will be no durable victory over the enemies of God, nor happiness among the nations."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET VOWS BY WHICH SHE CONSECRATED HERSELF MORE CLOSELY TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD—THE BENEFITS SHE DERIVED FROM THIS.

AFTER so many graces which our Lord was pleased to confer on His humble Bénigne, it is not surprising that He should have required from her an extraordinary correspondence with them. “On one Feast of the adorable Trinity,” said this beloved Sister, “I was incited to offer to God my liberty; and being suddenly raised above myself, and as it were into the Bosom of the Divinity, I offered to the power of the Father my power of disposing of that liberty; I offered to the Son, my Divine Spouse, my will to act by myself; I offered to the Holy Ghost, the Gift and the Giver, the love of all free use of that same liberty. Then I received from the Three Divine Persons the grace of deliberately choosing to devote by vow the three powers of my soul to their Divine good pleasure; and in my ecstasy I pronounced that vow of love. But in pronouncing it I lost sight of myself, and I felt that it was no longer by my own choice only that I made this sacrifice to God of my memory, my understanding, and my will; but that Divine Love, by whom I was excited to do it, pronounced it Himself, and that on my part I acted only by a strong but simple adherence to that same Love, and to His divine intentions. On a sudden I saw

the Three Divine Persons occupied in doing good to the victim thus immolated to their good pleasure; so that I found myself bound, by vow and by bonds of love, to be able no more to remember anything but God, and others only as much as He should point out to me; no longer to love anything but that Object, infinitely worthy of being loved, and creatures, according to His impulse and good pleasure. It pleased the adorable Trinity, by a return of love, to give me a new name, calling me by the title of queen, and queen of love. As such I professed to God an inviolable fidelity; and on His part He promised me a greater and more merciful love, assuring me that He would recompense the perfect attachment with which I had just given myself anew to Him. I returned to myself from my ecstasy, and I found that the matter of my vow was entirely spiritual; that it bound me to a more prompt fidelity, because I knew that, to reward it, God would furnish me with a more fruitful grace. Lastly, I saw with extreme satisfaction that I had pledged myself, my soul and its three powers, to the love of the good pleasure of my God; but in that slavery I found the true liberty of a daughter of pure love.

“Another time, being charmed with the beauty of a loving annihilation of my whole self, I made a vow never to approach my Lord Jesus Christ with dispositions of my own, except by making an act of profound humiliation when I was at liberty to do it, and striving by this annihilation to lose all that I am in God.”

It was often sought to intimidate her by making her fearful of the perfection of this vow, which she was told was greater than those made by several holy souls, and which she would find it impossible to practise. There were some confessors who offered to absolve her from these vows, and who forbade her to renew them, but after many most humiliating trials her love of God gained the victory, and triumphed over the fear that others felt for her. She observed them to the end, and assured me that she had scarcely ever had any scruples on this subject; "and I can declare," she said, "that those sacred bonds which have bound me so closely and intimately to God have given me a more holy freedom in all my conduct."

Thus, walking in the light of the eternal splendour, this chosen soul distinguished the lesser good from the greater, the most perfect from the perfect, the most sublime from the eminent, without constraint and without scruple. Ever attentive to God alone, she received from His Hand with a calm mind and unmoved countenance the sweet and the bitter, success or failure, annoyance or pleasure. "If we willingly receive good, why should we not also receive evil? If we take good things with love or submission," she would say, "why should we not accept with holy joy the ills which the divine good pleasure permits and gives to His greatest friends, to raise and strengthen their courage?" This devout Sister thus shared the sentiments of the great King David, who walked in the ways of God with a heart enlarged by divine love,

and who said with holy and joyful indifference, "It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, that I may learn Thy justifications ; but let Thy tender mercy also come unto me, and I shall live. This hath comforted me in my humiliation, because Thy word hath enlivened me ; let Thy mercy also come upon me, O Lord, so shall I answer them that reproach me in any thing, that I have trusted in Thy words ; they have enlarged my heart, and I have diligently run the way of Thy commandments."

And with what rapid strides did Bénigne advance in perfection by the observance of her vows of love ! "They are," she said, "what make the perfect practice of the three vows of religion easy to me ; for by the vow I have made to submit my memory to the good pleasure of God I shall live chastely and purely, filling it with nothing else but Him and His perfections. By that of submitting my understanding to the same good pleasure I shall live not only poor in temporal goods, but I shall be poor in spirit ; and shall I not become truly obedient by the immolation of my will, which is made subject to the divine good pleasure by a third vow ? In short, will not the observance of these vows make me all for God ?"

Once she said to me, "To-morrow I am to renew my secret vows. Oh ! I made these vows for love, and through excess of love, by my will being on fire and excited by love itself with a violence wholly loving, yes, truly loving, in which I find true freedom to act for God, and which leaves me only a sweet fear of

failing in that love, and in the obligations it imposes on me. These bonds, which imprison me and lead me captive, raise me in the Sovereign Good; they make me great in Him, and give me free access to His Divine Majesty. I find myself, as I think, happily unable to do anything else but what may honour and adore His divine good pleasure. Since I made these secret vows I abandon readily and with pleasure all the satisfaction I used formerly to take in destroying myself by my great austerities, and I no longer practise them but to please God, which renders them much more painful and fruitful to me. Moreover, from that time I have not known what it is to be precipitate, or to do anything whatever of myself and with myself. I feel an exceeding desire to obey not only the counsels of Jesus, the precepts of charity, and our constitutions and rules, but also the sweet and holy suggestions of grace; and when I follow them I feel, as it were sensibly, the delightful harmony there is between its intimate impulses and my actions.

“Jesus has told me that my state should be one of perfect adherence to grace; He also wills me to be subject to the laws of His sacred Infancy, which are littleness, indigence, humility, subjection to all, and knowledge of my own weakness. I will always remember those words of the Gospel, ‘Jesus grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom before His Father and before men, and He was subject to Mary and to Joseph.’ A child has no presumption, and a child of grace ought to fight against it, that he may no longer

have my a mind abandon itself to others, and I might abandon myself to God, to His grace, and to those who guide me."

CHAPTER XIV.

SHE IS EMPLOYED IN THE INFIRMARY, THEN AGAIN IN THE KITCHEN, AND OTHER SERVICES—THE BLESSINGS OUR LORD BESTOWED IN HER HOUSEHOLD WORK.

IN the year 1750 it was attempted to relieve Sister Jeanne Bénigne by removing her from her household offices, and giving her charge of the infirmary, where she remained about a year. Her charity was then most conspicuous in her assiduous care and attention to the sick, and, thanks to her care and her prayers, no one died during that period, though several were attacked by dangerous illness. Our honoured Mother de Lucinge especially was reduced to the last extremity, but that virtuous infirmarian prevailed before God, and obtained her recovery. The patient, and even the doctors, had more confidence in her prayers than in the resources of medicine, which, however, were not spared. Among others, M. Bourcier, one of the physicians of their Royal Highnesses, seeing the sudden and marvellous change in the malady, recognised that the devout infirmarian received extraordinary graces from Heaven, and could not help telling her so. This encouraged Sister Bénigne to impart to him the fear that had

been suggested to her, that she was in danger of losing her reason by the frequent and intense application of her mind to such sublime contemplation. That learned physician answered with consoling firmness, "God, who has destined you to accomplish the designs of grace and of His work in you, has also provided you with a head perfectly capable of His divine operations; do not doubt your strength to support them, take the food that is necessary, do not watch so long, and restrain your penances, and then go on in confidence." He afterwards said to our Mother de Lucinge: "In truth, Mother, you have no need of us so long as you have that holy Sister near you."

At this time she had also to nurse our dear Sister Anne Thérèse Lesne; she knew so well how to console her that she made her find sweetness in enduring the violence of an internal ulcer which made her suffer a martyrdom. They parted from each other with great and mutual regret, when Bénigne had to be sent back to the household work. During the time she had been absent from it, it was found what blessings she had brought down upon it, and what an advantage her economy had been; the other sisters having spent twice as much, which was no slight embarrassment at that time, for the income was small, and it was absolutely necessary to finish the building of this house. Our first Mothers and sisters used often to say, it must be owned that this good Sister's confidence in Divine Providence is so great, that everything is multiplied in her hands, and the blessing of God is visibly upon her.

At that period, with very limited means, they had to entertain strangers at any moment, on account of the beatification of our holy Father; the lawyers and messengers who carried the papers for the process backward and forward, usually stayed on their way with our ecclesiastics; and our dispenser was constantly asked for a dinner or a breakfast for such a one. Bénigne generally answered only by a slight bow, and in a little while everything was well prepared and in order. No one could tell where she found what she gave, unless it were in the treasury of Him who made all things out of nothing.

One of the sisters who was cook for several years took pleasure in doing the dinner on Christmas Day a great deal too much, that she might have a pretext for staying up all that holy night; and the dishes were so overdone that it was not possible to give out the portions neatly. "That would have disturbed me," said Sister Bénigne, "for I like to treat my sisters well, especially on so great a day; but I prayed to my King Jesus to help me, as He had promised to do in what concerned my office; then I took what was intended for those blessed portions of the spouses of Jesus, and everything became orderly, and I could serve them perfectly well, and as I wished." This change greatly astonished the sister who had given occasion for this little wonder worked by God in favour of His Bénigne.

As everything that she prepared had a particularly good taste, the other sisters in the kitchen often begged

her to show them more exactly how she seasoned things so well. The Superior blamed her for not doing so, as for a want of charity and sincerity; this gave her much pain, and she answered humbly, "O Mother, I often do not even know what I put in, and I can assure you it is so little that without the blessing of our Lord I do not think you would suffer me to be in the dispensary or the kitchen."

This divine assistance was observed in all that was under the care of this humble Sister, and caused her management and services to be so advantageous to the community. The following is another proof of this, faithfully copied from her notes written by the express order of her Superior. "On going into retreat, I was told to keep the keys of the cellar to distribute the wine to the community, as I always did; a few days after my Mother sent to ask me for them; I was a little startled, because I kept all my writings there; I went directly to take them away, and on giving up the keys I asked pardon of our Lord for the faults I might have committed in that blessed cellar, and thanked Him for the graces He had there bestowed on me in such profusion. I learnt that the next day they had sent for some men to see and taste the wine, because they feared it might have been spoilt by the hot wind, as had been the case in several cellars in the town; and unfortunately they were not mistaken. Our Mother deigned to visit me in my retreat the day after, and told me this, but took care not to show me the anxiety it caused her, because the house was then very

short of money. I was surprised at this accident, yet without being disturbed by it, for I trusted in all things to Providence, and I continued my exercises in in great tranquillity. Afterwards the keys were given back to me ; on returning to the cellar, I fell on my knees according to my custom, asking my Lord Jesus for His blessing upon me and upon the wine. In a few days they sent for the same cellarmen to make some arrangements ; I spoke to them of this wine, but they told me roughly that it was entirely spoilt, and that it was of no use thinking of anything but buying some more. I said to them, ‘ Let us just see whether a little of it is not good at least to drink in the meanwhile.’ This made them angry ; I tried to persuade them gently, and they began to taste one cask, and then another, and looking at each other they asked if it was possible that this could be the same store they had seen the first time they came, which they declared and swore they had found entirely spoilt ; they thanked God with us for this change.” Our Sister Péronne Marie Belin, who assisted the men, has often assured me that they cried “ A miracle, a miracle, a miracle of Mother Bénigne,” for so she was called by our masons and other workmen who knew her, and who all thought her a saint.

She remained amid the household cares of Martha till 1660, she was then put into the refectory, where she was employed during fourteen years ; and here also we had occasion to marvel at the loving-kindness of God, who satisfied all her wishes.

Several workmen had been employed in our flower garden, and the procuratrix, who was economical and anxious, told the Superior, our Mother de Lucinge, that this work seemed to her to be useless, and that it consumed a great quantity of bread. The good Mother did not like to disappoint the novice who was making this little improvement, and it was besides very useful for rearing flowers and embellishing the house, without costing more than the bread which the sister regretted; therefore she told that novice to go and ask Sister Bénigne for bread from the refectory, but to let nobody see it. The humble Sister gave it her without hesitation and with her usual sweet cordiality. Once the Sister who took it said to her before me : " I must carry it away secretly that our beloved Mother may not be displeased ;" on which Sister Bénigne answered her with a gracious look that had something heavenly in it : " You may be sure that nobody will know anything about it, for this bread that I give you does not at all diminish what is usually given out to me for the community, and I shall not want a bit more." This became known, but the humble Bénigne disowned the miracle, by saying that our Lord had willed thus to give a proof of the goodness of the Superior, and of the merit of obedience, adding, " Alas ! we are not mistresses of the goods of the house of God, but only stewards and distributors of them ; it belongs to God to provide everything, and He will do so if we trust in Him alone ; His riches and His bounty never fail."

When she was taken away from the refectory she

was given the charge of the pupils. She waited upon them with such kindness and humility, that she gained their esteem and affection, and easily persuaded them to be good; all the children used to run after her, calling her St. Bénigne. She often recommended herself to their prayers, saying she found them of great avail because of their innocence. None of them left the convent without feelings of great esteem for her virtue.

After this she was given the care of the community-room, and had to light the fire there in winter; and as nothing was little in her eyes, she attended to this with an assiduity and punctuality which edified every one, though from her infirmities she was scarcely able to walk. She herself carried most of the wood and charcoal, and never dispensed herself from any work belonging to her office. In those last years of war and scarcity, she once said to us: "I know, Mother, that your charity wishes me to keep the sisters from suffering cold, I follow your intention in always making a good fire; but fear nothing, our Lord will help us, and with His blessing the store of fuel will not diminish." She said these words with an air of holiness, that inspired me with fresh respect for this humble Sister.

She made all the cords and laces that are required for the sisters and the household, spinning, twisting and bleaching all the thread for them, besides what was required for making the napkins for the refectory. ~~Her~~ ^{Her} cell was her little paradise, and she was often

found there quite rapt in God, and at the same time plying her distaff. I once asked her how she could be so assiduous at her work while her Spouse showered so many graces upon her; she answered me: "Ah! Sister, am not I poor by vow, and a servant by my position in the house of our Lord? Therefore, I must in both capacities occupy myself with work; my holy Angels help me to do my work, and make me think highly of manual labour." She enjoyed inconceivable pleasures in that little place; she seemed, she said, to be, so to speak, happier than if she were in heaven, since besides enjoying almost all the happiness that is there, she had also the advantage of being able to suffer. We had to allow her a few moments to return to herself when we went to speak to her, and then she received us with the utmost affection. She said, speaking of her cell, "How many times has that great All whom nothing can contain, descended into this little corner, to favour and entertain with his love the heart of His poor Bénigne."

She never left her cell but for her regular exercises. In community she behaved with angelic modesty, and with such great and evident respect for us, that she gained ours for herself; and indeed every one of us felt in approaching her a certain consolation which taught us what treasures of grace were contained in her soul.

CHAPTER XV.

HER INTERIOR SUFFERINGS—HER IMMOLATION OF HERSELF TO DIVINE JUSTICE OUT OF PURE LOVE—SHE ENTERS UPON A SERIOUS EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE, AND DESCRIBES HER SO-CALLED ENORMOUS SINS.

HER Divine Spouse came to her one night, with His hair full of the drops of His painful graces. More promptly than the spouse of the Canticles, she instantly opened to Him the door of her heart ; on entering, the Spouse showed her that she must let Him shed over her that dew with which His Head was covered, a dew of fresh sufferings of every kind ; and taught her that souls destined like hers to be entrusted with the interests of His glory and to attain to a perfect union with Him, must pass through temptations, darkness, and mortal anguish, overwhelming and supernatural fears and sadness, that they may thus share the sufferings of the Heart of Jesus Christ. "I confess," she said, "that through these sufferings there was some conformity between the Creator and His unworthy creature, and that from that moment my interior pains were as it were rendered divine by Jesus ; but this cannot be described ; I can only avow that the soul suffers by participation, and the mind by adherence ; the will suffers because it does not suffer enough, and the body languishes, so that the suffering is universal. The soul knows the greatness of the Object for whom it suffers, and what He has Himself suffered, she knows that He is alone worthy of love, she

loves Him solely and above all, and in this reciprocal love, love itself unites them in suffering."

"I feel especially," she said, "a sensible torment from seeing my God offended in so many ways and by so many persons of every age, sex, and condition, and even by religious! Oh, how I suffer from being made the witness of that multitude of souls who do not profit by the graces and the merits of the Blood of Jesus Christ, but who on the contrary despise both! The loss of those souls so dear to their Creator, is the chief cause of my pain, and of the exceeding bitterness of my heart. Alas! I have seen that torrent of grief swelled by my own infidelities! I should wish to be able to publish them to the whole world, that I might draw upon myself the scorn and contempt of all creatures, and that I might be struck and beaten with more justice than the spouse of Holy Scripture. In this state I beseech pardon for myself and for all the world; I address myself to my sisters, and especially to our little girls, to ask them to pray that the Heart of Jesus in its loving-kindness may pardon me. Then I wish to destroy myself a thousand times, I wish to suppress all complacency, I wish for the contempt of creatures, I wish to humble myself even amid the light and the knowledge which are bestowed on me by His love!"

But even all this bundle of myrrh which this spouse kept pressed to her heart, was not sufficiently painful for her. "Love itself," she said, "makes me suffer; it is love that gives me an intense horror of seeing

Love Himself offended by sin, and especially by my own. I look indeed for everything from grace, but my poor correspondence with it kills me! I see that God wants good works, and I do none; that is my terrible grief! I hope, I desire, because I believe, but my faith does not make me act with sufficient energy. I love, but I am far from answering to His love, and to the expectation of Him who is my hope. Every moment I am excited to love Him, and this attraction is so strong that it elevates me in God, so that it takes away my faculty of understanding what is said to me and what I do; everything is hidden from me; in this helplessness I am confused at my nothingness, my confusion throws me into an excess of love, which again causes me a fresh and more violent torment, seeing that I can suffer nothing for God since His love takes away all my pain. I am taught that the enjoyment of God kindles my love, my love excites my pain, my pain tends to the desire of a greater pain, and that pain gives joy; joy and love cause me to languish, and this languishing makes me die because I cannot suffer enough.

“The enormities of my life cast me into an abyss of grief, but love raises me out of it, inspiring me with a feeling of sweet confidence; His Divine Hand then carries me so high as to place me again in the Bosom of God, and then I feel my soul so pressed, so bound to the Sovereign Good that love seems to cover my eyes with a bandage, and to let me see nothing but Him alone. He binds me hand and foot to cast me

onto my funeral pile, where I wait for the death-blow. My submission to His loving Will so augments my love that it deprives me of all that is my own, and I lose myself in God ; but I find and recover all in that very love ; its sharp operation is so painful that nothing is more difficult to bear ; sometimes it tyrannises in a divine manner over the heart of poor Bénigne by making her feel pleasure in her pain, and that pleasure afflicts her by diminishing her sufferings. How often have I heard in the midst of my pain the enchanting voice of my Spouse saying to me : ‘ Bénigne, I will make my love triumph in thy favour,’ but even that kindness becomes an instrument of love to torment me more, by representing to me that His infinite goodness is repaid by ingratitude and cowardice.

“Then I say to myself, Alas ! nothing does any good to man, unless he is good himself ! but afterwards the divine loving-kindness inspires me with a familiarity which removes all apprehension. He does not allow me to remain long in humiliation before Him, except when my will has concurred, though confusedly, with the least of my faults, then He lets me weep, suffer, and lament. But the bitterest subject of my lamentations always is the enormity of sin, and the outrage committed by the sinner against God, for that my soul refuses to be comforted, my martyrdom is cruel, and my pain terrible. No one can express it, and even she who has endured it cannot describe it, because she cannot well conceive it ; if she could, she would if possible plunge into the abyss of nothingness.”

She added, that to repair the injury done to God by sin, she offered and sacrificed herself as a victim to divine justice, and that by a loving consent she gave Him full liberty to exercise it upon her in every way, for as long as He might will and His glory might require. At the moment that she made this immolation, she was rapt in God for several hours, and she saw a ray of the beauty and holiness of that adorable justice. But as I shall have occasion, afterwards, to speak of the divine justice, I will only say that Bénigne suffered much from the fears which people suggested to her lest that offering should be rash; but she was consoled by this reflection, that even if God should make her endure here below the pains of hell, His justice in that great and complete punishment would still be environed with mercy, and that mercy proceeding from infinite goodness would attract and merit love, and that not being deprived either of love or of the power of loving, she would consider herself blissful in her pains, since the possession of the true love of God is our sole beatitude.

This soul so devoured by zeal for the divine justice, began to exercise it upon herself, and often made strict examinations of conscience, to discover the least atoms of imperfection; I will detail them here, being sure that the shadows of the life of this soul, so beloved by Jesus, will show forth more brilliantly the operations of light He was pleased to work in her.

"It is a great sin," she says in her writings, "that I have not acquired all the virtues in their utmost

perfection, and as the Constitutions enjoin me; the profound humility, the cordial gentleness, the kindness with all my neighbours, the simplicity and facility in acquiescing in the will of others, which are the virtues of a true daughter of the Visitation; I greatly esteem those who possess them; but as for me I have scarcely learnt them, and I cannot say that I no longer commit any faults against them. Alas! how black is my ingratitude in receiving incessantly so many gifts from God and giving Him nothing in return."

After having repeatedly expressed in her writings all the sentiments of a perfect soul, she adds: "What progress have I made? Ungrateful Bénigne, where are thy abundant fruits and thy efficacious works? Blush with shame at not finding thy patience invincible in pain, nor thy sweetness unruffled under contempt; but at still feeling, on the contrary, for some moments, an emotion which makes thy blood rise and tinge thy face with its colour. God must be satisfied for the sins committed against Him; it is I who am the chief and most abominable sinner, not fulfilling His justice as I ought and as I have promised Him, still rebelling sometimes against the weight of my crosses, and by this fault not giving Him sufficient liberty to punish me as a criminal. I do not detest often enough the natural inclination that I might have to evil; nor do I thank God enough for the grace He has conferred on me of having so strong a leaning towards good.

"Alas! O Lord, O Lord! all my ills no doubt come from my not examining my defects sufficiently to weigh

their enormity. This blindness is a great evil, and if it exists in me, I do not detest it heartily enough. Oh ! how much this ignorance is to be feared ; it makes me tremble ! But there is another evil which I find in myself : it is that after having sinned, I reflect upon myself with pity, before I have recourse to God in order to appease His indignation by a humble avowal ; this ought to humble me and make me watch over myself, since I can still be guilty of such great impurities in divine love. I do not profit enough by the grace which God so often gives me of knowing my sins and confessing them, and thus both become in a way fruitless, since complete amendment does not follow. Oh ! how much I am to be pitied for my negligence ! I do not speak of falls of surprise by which God often humbles a soul, without its love being affected by them ; but I speak of the least faults committed with any consent of the will, for these offend and displease pure Love. I sometimes do useless and indeliberate actions, for want of attention, and I say words of the same nature ; this is a sin that I think is enormous in myself ; such is everything that is not done or said for God, or for some good and charitable intention. When I am told that by my indiscreet penances I have reduced myself to such a state, that my Superiors have been obliged to relieve me from my fatiguing household offices, have I not reason to detest those indiscretions ? And my self-love again increases my evil, for it is perhaps the source and cause of my tears, which have

obliged our Lord to console me for this, saying to me : 'Be not disturbed, Bénigne ; did not I myself, and of myself go to the utmost excess of love for men and for the glory of my Father ? If you no longer carry your heavy crosses of the fatigues of the kitchen, you shall carry a portion of mine which weighed upon me from the moment I was conceived in the bosom of Mary up to Calvary.' "

There is among her papers a long list of all the defects that may be committed by religious and also several examens ; I asked her one day to what purpose she had written all that, which seemed to me of no use to her. "Alas !" she answered, "must not I look at them that I may derive the necessary light to avoid them, or at least to know my ingratitude when I do not thank God for preventing me from falling into all those faults ; if His holy Hand did not hold me back, should not I do still worse ? Yet my gratitude is not lively enough for being saved from so great a misfortune. I am also wanting in charity by not praying enough for the perseverance of the just and perfect. My love of God is so impure that I am more grieved for my own sins than for those of others." She kept notes of the imperfections which the sisters said they had remarked in her, when they were asked in the Refectory or Chapter, according to the custom of the Order. I asked her why she did this, since they were only very slight failings in the highest perfection. "Ah !" she said, "ought I not to blush with shame,

seeing that at Annecy nothing was found to correct, and that even now they still see in me reasons for charitably warning me?"

These are the faults of which her Guardian Angel accused her before the Throne of Jesus: having resisted taking the black veil; having sometimes yielded to the pleasure she took in destroying herself by her austerities. "These heavenly spirits," she said, "often invite me to practise them, but they instruct me to separate from them all pleasure of my own, that I may satisfy only that of God and His divine justice." She regretted as a great fault that she had sometimes withdrawn from her great inundations of grace to relieve herself and be able to apply to her work. She usually called herself a stagnant mire, because she thought people failed to correct her for fear of disturbing the stench of her faults; and once she wept bitterly for having delayed the signal for rising for a few minutes, thinking she had made the community fail in regularity. One of the faults which she considered horrible was that she had complained of the sisters being curious to see her writings, and trying their utmost to take them from her; and had thought they thus did her injustice in wanting to know her graces without communicating their own to her, for she thought they were all as much favoured by God as she was; she also considered herself the cause of their failing in the practice of that point of our constitutions which enjoins us not to interfere with one another's affairs. She gave the following account of

her interior to Père Baratte, in a writing of which she kept a copy :—

“ It is true, Father, I leave myself to the guidance of God. I would not for the world contradict His good pleasure, or the least of His designs. I would rather die a thousand times than offend Him. I have a mortal hatred of the very least defects. My desire to please my neighbour is founded only on my desire to please God in him ; all the rest is indifferent to me. I think so little of my own interest, Father, that contradictions, and any thing that may be said of me, whether good or evil, affect me equally—that is to say, as things which no longer concern me. But, Father, what is this little goodness in a soul that knows God, and receives infinite favours from Him, and to whom He has granted so great a gift of peace, for I find I still feel certain things, such as losing Holy Communion, not being allowed to torment myself with austerities, and seeing that often when I intend to serve my sisters better I annoy them ? It seems to me indeed, Father, that God makes me, as it were, a reservoir of His graces, but on my part I am nothing but a poisonous sink of imperfections ; for instance, when I look at some event in itself, and not as permitted by God.

“ Ah ! Father, do not I thus withdraw myself from the guidance of God and His designs upon me, since He wills me to be immolated to His good pleasure ? Again, am I not criminal, Father, when I excuse myself for my little progress in perfection, by thinking I want help. Have I not become guilty before heaven

and earth, when I have amused myself with desiring to be unemployed, under pretext of being no longer in a position to annoy my neighbour, although I have never even thought of doing so? Is it keeping myself steadily on the cross, when I desire to come down from it? Do not I seek myself by my desire that God should do this or that with me, after having so clearly seen that God loves nothing so much as a heart that has given up its own feelings; and that nothing gives Him more glory than a heart which no longer subsists by any will of its own, but which wishes to live wholly abandoned to His divine Will. It was the sight of such a heart that impelled me to make my secret vows."

Such were the greatest faults of this soul; and from this we may judge of the height of her virtues. She certainly saw and penetrated with eagle eyes into the light of the Sun of Justice, to discover in all things what would be most pleasing to Him, and to find the best and surest road by which to reach the highest point of divine union, and a total separation from her whole self.

CHAPTER XVI.

HER PRESENTIMENT OF HER APPROACHING DEATH—THE PAINFUL
WAYS BY WHICH GOD PREPARED HER FOR IT.



THE time was drawing near when death was to deprive us of the precious treasure we possessed in our dear Sister Jeanne Bénigne. She was a fruit which Divine Love had Himself ripened

by His ardour, and which He came to gather in our garden ; but she was first to finish drinking the chalice of which our Lord had reserved the dregs for her last days, by making her then return to the way of Calvary, and there aid Him to carry His Cross, as He had often told her.

It was during the Lent of 1692 that we perceived that this fair light would soon be extinguished. Her life seemed a miracle, and, indeed, we did not know how it was supported. I told her this made me anxious, and she confidently assured me that Holy Communion sufficed her both as a remedy and nourishment. "I have now no taste for anything," she said to me, "save that Bread of Life; and nothing but that divine food prevents my dying. You will see that I shall survive only two days being deprived of that heavenly nourishment."

One day she came to me and said, "Mother, at the Ascension we shall have Sister Françoise Dorothee de Valpergue for our Superior, under whom I have known for many years that I am to die." She had already told me this long before, adding that she had had this knowledge since the year 1654, when that honoured Mother came to us as a postulant.

At the end of that Lent, Sister Jeanne Bénigne was suddenly attacked by new sufferings, and almost overwhelmed by their weight. Her legs, which had been enormously swelled for more than thirty years, broke, and for some time she dressed the two large wounds herself, not allowing any one to see them. Afterwards,

as they grew worse, she begged me not to oblige her to quit her cell, which was to her an anticipation of paradise, but only to give her a fervent young novice, whom she was very fond of, to help her to go up the stairs. I had not courage to force her, for fear the assurance which our Lord had given her should come to pass, that is to say, that when she should stay in the infirmary she would never leave it, and that when she took human remedies for her ills, which proceeded from divine causes, she would cease to suffer by ceasing to live. But after the election was over, our dear new Mother, seeing her wounds, immediately obliged her, with great charity, to go to the infirmary, and to show them to the cleverest surgeons who were called in. They admired the patience of this virtuous Sister, who truly inspired veneration by her modesty, serenity, and the generosity which kept her from showing any fear of so violent and painful a malady. They ordered her several local remedies, and some very mild lenitives, for she had been so weak for many years that she could bear no more.

Poor Bénigne told me once that these remedies made her suffer the pains of purgatory, and that she well knew nothing could relieve suffering which God wills should be endured. Nevertheless, the Sister who attended her assured me that she never heard her utter the smallest complaint; that, on the contrary, she pitied the others for the trouble they took for her, and kept herself in perfect submission to her kind infirmarian, whom she loved with holy dilection. She

humbly entreated her not to deprive her of the consolation of going every day to Holy Communion, which was granted her with the approbation of the Superior; therefore, she received It as usual, and found in It the only respite from her terrible sufferings.

It was thought advisable to purify her soul still further from all attachment she might have to her writings which she had composed and kept under obedience, and to oblige her to give them all up, as well as her little store of thread for the cords, and the candles for the community-room, of which she had the charge. She instantly submitted, giving them up in the spirit of abandonment and sacrifice. "Alas!" she said, "I am reduced to remembering no more the favours of my God; I found some consolation in reading a few lines of those which are recorded in my rough notes, to revive my heart a little, but I have profited so little by those divine mercies that it is just to deprive me of this comfort."

She then began to experience the fulfilment of what had been predicted to her by Him who is Truth itself. She was reduced to complete interior desolation, and deprived of all light and divine consolation; no longer remembering, she said, how to pray, unable even to say a whole Paternoster at once, or to form a single act of divine virtue, except that of adoration of the good pleasure of God in herself and in all things. She went about asking every one to do her the charity of teaching her how to ask pardon of our Lord for her faults; she could scarcely speak, and seemed not to

know anybody. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "nothing, nothing consoles this poor lover whom her Beloved has left; I can find no help, I am utterly abandoned in this painful state!" All the little pupils who met her were obliged to promise to pray for her, and she entreated the sisters to say some good words to her, imploring them with tears not to forget her in their fervent prayers; "I am," she said, "unspeakably in need of them." The weakness and languor from which she suffered made her frequently say, "Alas! Bénigne, thou seest the fruit of thy indiscreet penances." She thought, like St. Bernard, that she had great reason to ask pardon of her body, and still more of religion, because she had thus rendered herself useless and reduced herself to the necessity of giving trouble to others. "O Jesus! Thy love forced me for a long time to refuse myself everything; afterwards obedience obliged me to grant myself what was necessary, and now my indiscretion puts me in an odious state, in which I require a great deal. O God! to what hast Thou reduced Bénigne! to seek for delicacies! How I abhor myself for it! to feel myself languish if I do not eat often! Is it possible, O Jesus, that I can be the same who was nourished by Thy love, and who found her life in those sacred swoons which were caused by Thy divine operations, and were the effects of Thy grace and of Thy love?"

Everything served to crucify her soul, and to consummate the perfection of her loving sacrifices. If her refreshments were put off for a little while she

was much disturbed by these slight delays; then, seeing herself so charitably nursed, she felt a painful humiliation at being so well treated. A hash of chicken, a fresh egg, a little broth, these she thought excessive delicacies; not to be able to do without a bit of toast dipped in wine, or a biscuit between her two meals, was a necessity that seemed intolerable to our dear invalid.

Her heart, formerly so tranquil, so full of peace and love of the Sovereign Good, was attacked on all sides by cruel anxieties. She suffered so much from this during the night that she got up and asked some of the sisters who slept in the infirmary to watch with her. When I heard of her pitiable state in this respect I went to see her and try to give her some consolation. She said, on seeing me, "Is it you, my true Sister, who speak to me? Alas! I am no longer Bénigne; I am a poor deserted one; I no longer know how to love God; I do not even know whether I have ever loved Him; yet it seems to me that the Lover whom I now never see, who no more does me the honour of speaking to me, makes known to me in a way that is new to me that I shall soon die; yes, my true Sister, my end is not far off. I cannot possibly live when I no longer know how to love God." Then, touched with tender compassion, I said to her: "Acknowledge that it is now true that you have followed the steps of Jesus only as far as the sentence of death, and that the time is come, as it was so often foretold you, when you must pursue your

path to Calvary, and die there with Him. You know that He frequently forewarned you of His crucifying designs for the hour of your death, that He told you it would be the consummation of your pains and sufferings—that is to say, that they will then be all combined in a quintessence of bitterness—but you know also the promise He made you, that His sweet and Holy Mother would console you in this state.” She raised her eyes, and looking at me, gently said: “O God! is it from Him that you recall to my mind those sweet promises? Is it indeed true that He told me my most Holy Mother Mary would be near me? Alas! I cannot remember a single one of those words by the strength and grace of which the merciful goodness of my God has so often consoled me! It seems to me impossible now to believe that it was to this nothingness that the great and Sovereign All granted such immense favours! Holy Communion, indeed, supports me, but I no longer find in it that divine savour which was my delight and my remedy during so many years!”

She used to go to the choir and return with an air of sadness that inspired the greatest compassion. “Ah!” she said, “I seek my Love in vain; I can no longer find Him! Pray for me, my sisters; have pity on this faithless one. I have ruined everything; I have resisted God; I believe I have constrained Him to treat me with such severity by so often refusing the sweetness of His divine favours. I sheltered myself under the veil of obedience, but it

was perhaps only my cowardice that made me refuse those profusions of graces, lest I should have been obliged to make as generous a return to God as such liberality required."

She would sometimes go to our Confessor and say to him, "Father, listen to me, help me; you will not have to do it much longer." But she came away without any consolation, God so permitting, that everything might contribute to purify and embellish her soul. She also frequently addressed our honoured Mother, entreating her to help her, and "to take care," she said, "of this wretch, this nothingness; I find in myself nothing good; alas! I feel only the weight of sin." Such was her distressing state; she followed Jesus Christ laden with the burden of the sins of all mankind in the weight of His Cross. At other times she said, "O my Mother! show me, I entreat you, how to love God. Ah! where is the love gone which used to possess me so entirely? Help me, help me to carry this heavy cross!" Her charity told her, among other things, to say often these words: "*Jesu, fiat, fiat voluntas tua.*" She frequently repeated them, and if she did not find in it any sensible consolation she derived from it, at least from moment to moment, strength to endure the severe trials to which Love subjected her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONSUMMATION OF HER SUFFERINGS—HER PRECIOUS DEATH.

IN the beginning of September, after the wounds in her legs had caused her intense suffering, they suddenly healed ; this redoubled all her other pains, which became more and more extraordinary ; her bones made a noise on the least movement as if they had been dislocated ; her arms especially became helpless, and she was reduced to depend upon others for all assistance. This poor creature was an object of the tenderest pity ; her whole body was so wasted away that she might truly say with Job, “ The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin, and nothing but lips are left about my teeth.” The violence of the pain was shown by the frequent and sudden changes of her countenance, which was often livid and corpse-like.

This spouse of Jesus crucified could find no position easy ; she was as it were doubled in two, without the power of straightening herself either in bed or out of it. One day our Mother said to her, “ My Sister, I thought you were nailed to the cross, but one would think your shoulders were laden with it.” “ Alas !” she answered, “ yes, Mother, I must still carry it, and the way is long and painful ; help me, help me, nothing consoles me, not even a shadow of relief remains to me in my mortal agony ! Love has stripped

this poor spouse of all the adornments He had given her, I can no longer see His gifts ; He has deprived me of all grace and I am quite naked, I am no longer His Bénigne, I am all disfigured."

"Teach me, my dear Sister," she said to me one day, "where I can find my Love again and suggest to my mind some words to say to Him that may move Him to compassion," on which I told her to say often Jesus, be to me Jesus. She replied, "Ah! my true Sister, my painful experience shows me clearly how much the gentle Jesus suffered to acquire that name of Saviour. I must also satisfy His Father and render Him glory, by allowing His justice to be in some way exercised upon His unworthy creature."

She rose every morning to go to the choir and receive the Bread of life, which was all in all to her. She failed not in her usual modesty and recollection, striving as best she could to keep her hands clasped, though it was very painful to her, her arms being, as we have said, stiff and dislocated. I often found her in the little chapel of Bethlehem, sitting on a chair reading some book, usually that of the sacred writings left by our holy Founder ; she then roused herself a little from her mortal sadness, and asked me to teach her to make an act of contrition. I once said to her, "Ah! Bénigne, I believe that the *Deus propitius esto mihi peccatori* of your favourite, the humble publican, means more than we can comprehend, and these short words contain, I think, many acts of virtue." She answered me humbly, "You are right, Sister, I think

so too." Another time I told her that I often repeated these words for her intention : *Confirma hoc Deus quod operatus es in nobis*. And with a look of joy she said, "How much I thank you for this kindness !" Then she added immediately, "But, Sister, have I not spoilt all that the Holy Spirit has done in me? I can behold nothing now but the horror of sin of which I bear the weight ; that destroyer of the divine image and of all grace is ever present to me."

"Ah ! my dear Bénigne," I said to her, "you must never believe that your weakness can have destroyed or spoilt the powerful operation of God in you, love assuredly would not permit that ; renew your secret vows by which you made yourself entirely His." "How sweet is this hope !" she replied, "but the pleasure it gives me will not last long, because my mind is occupied with the contempt that is shown of divine graces and of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ." This shows the application of her mind to all the subjects which caused the bitterest pains of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially during His Passion, which she was then honouring, and of which she bore a strong and painful impression.

I should have learnt some admirable secrets of her soul on this subject, if she had thought she had leave still to speak to me of her interior. She sometimes, however, said to me, "My true Sister, I cannot express to you what I suffer in my body and mind, in my soul and my heart ; this heart seems no longer to know what love is, yet it suffers as being immolated to that

very love, without seeing the love that has led it to the place of its sacrifice."

In this way she passed five whole months, plunged as it were in a sea of suffering, with an almost supernatural patience, and was never heard to utter a word of complaint. Certainly nothing relieved her; on the contrary, everything contributed to afflict and grieve her. She never ceased saying to our Mother, "Help me, have pity on me!" and kept her for whole hours saying to her, "O Mother, am I not on the edge of the precipice! I feel that I do nothing that is good, and my heart has hardly any love for God."

It was once said in her presence that the Sister who sat up with her almost every night would at last be ill, and it would be difficult to restore her to health. Our beloved Bénigne then spoke, and gravely and sweetly replied: "No, Mother, your charity need not be anxious, nor my Sister the infirmarian either; the care that dear Sister takes of me will do her no harm, be assured of that;" and this saying was soon verified. That good Sister whose health gave us uneasiness because she had assisted one who was consumptive, and had died before the illness of Sister Bénigne, and because she had actually a bad cough and a languid appearance, recovered her health; from the day of the death of that humble Sister her cough ceased, she regained flesh, and thenceforward was perfectly well.

In a little conversation that we had together Sister Bénigne said to me, "Oh! how excessive were the pains of our Lord Jesus Christ during the last hour of

His Passion! And how painfully incomprehensible is the participation in them which He gives me!" I tried to make her explain herself better, but she replied, "This is to me a time of silence." On this I said to her, "Yes, Sister, the Evangelists do not relate that Jesus spoke after His sentence of death till he was on the Cross, except to tell the daughters of Jerusalem not to weep for Him, but for themselves. Then Bénigne smiled a little, a holy joy appeared in her countenance, and she said to me with tender kindness, "Yes, my true Sister, relate of your miserable Bénigne what you understood in her; I have told you before, and I repeat it, God enables you to describe better than I could myself all that passes in my soul; it is not in my power to tell you more at present, than that He alone is my life, and that my human nature is as it were destroyed."

She remained in silence in her corner of the infirmary, and although she could no longer work, she still tried to fill her spindles for the cord. She received all the sisters who visited her with kindness and gentleness, but she could scarcely speak to them, except to recommend herself to their prayers, and to do that she gathered up all her remaining strength.

I went to bid her adieu as I was going into retreat, and she caressed me tenderly, saying, "Alas! my departure draws near, my road is ended and my journey is almost over, why will you leave me?" I promised her that I would ask permission to see her every day, and she begged me not to fail to do so. On All Saints

Day she again went to the choir to receive Holy Communion, though she was worse than the day before, for she had a severe attack of fever. She was obliged to be carried back from the choir to the infirmary on a chair; and the next day, Sunday, she could not be allowed to rise from her bed, and was therefore deprived of Holy Communion. This privation was a martyrdom for her poor heart, which lived only on that heavenly Food. In the evening I obtained permission to sit up with her, which I did with so much consolation and unction, that I have felt few sweetnesses in my life equal to those I enjoyed during that night. She took some little nourishment till near midnight, and after that time she would take nothing more, though her thirst was excessive, as she owed to me; but she refused to quench it in the hope of being able to receive her God in the morning. She spoke a little to me in a way that seemed to me truly superhuman and no longer of the earth. I asked her if she suffered much. "Alas!" she answered, "who can know and understand that better than you, who know the cause of my sufferings! Yes, my true Sister, I am on the cross, and I am painfully crucified; I can tell you nothing else." It is impossible to express what respect this victim of love and of the cross inspired; it was difficult to leave her. I asked her if she would not pray for various things which I named to her. "Yes, yes, my true Sister, I will pray for all your intentions, I will never forget you; I will also ask of God that the virtue of my incomparable

Mother de Chantal may be recognised throughout the world by command of Holy Church."

On Monday morning her ardent desires were gratified; she communicated with the utmost self-abasement; she asked pardon of the Community in an audible voice, and renewed her vows according to the long formula, in spite of the extreme difficulty she had in speaking. As to her secret vows she had renewed them during the night, and she begged me to do it often for her during the time she might live without being able to speak. After this she revived a little, and her countenance appeared more grave and sweet; she spoke to our Mother, and promised to pray for her, for their Royal Highnesses, for the nations, and, above all, for peace, for our house, and for the whole Institute.

She also promised some of the sisters never to forget them before God, saying a few good and holy words to them. I asked her if she did not promise also to pray for my sister the Superior of our Monastery of Rome; then, her face colouring brightly, she answered me in a loud voice, "Yes, yes, Sister, I will, and also for our dear sisters of Naples. Oh! what great designs God has upon that house!"

Towards evening the fever increased and our dear Bénigne felt as if she were in a fire; this heat seemed surprising in a person of her age, especially as she had been for a long time reduced to extreme weakness; but it was a sign of the interior flame that devoured her heart. She closed her eyes to open them no

more to the light of this world ; and they looked all bruised and discoloured. This night was more painful and terrible than any other, and after the morning she spoke no more. She received extreme unction with all the marks of profound humility. She passed Tuesday and the following night in the same state, and on Wednesday she entered into a sort of agony, of more than natural interior suffering ; her countenance expressed a great sadness, which seemed to have something divine in it, since it impressed us all with deep and secret reverence.

The Abbé Corti, our ordinary confessor, assisted her with such affectionate assiduity as showed us clearly that he was happy to be the Father, the director, and most intimate confidant of the admirable secrets of this great soul. He was accompanied by our chaplain M. Valendo ; and during two days neither of them left her except for a little while now and then.

The bed of this victim of the loving justice of God was surrounded by the community, who found it difficult to leave her, for the sight of her truly inspired devotion. Her countenance underwent frequent and marvellous changes, and M. Valendo said that being there only as an assistant he had had ample leisure to observe her, and had remarked many things that were supernatural and extraordinary in the agony of the humble and devout Sister Jeanne Bénigne.

At length we suddenly saw her breathing stop, and it was truly surprising that her soul could not separate itself, without a very violent struggle, from

that body which had always been so submissive to it.

Her countenance immediately assumed an expression of heavenly peace, full of gravity and sweetness. Her body, which had been so rigid, remained quite soft and supple; she looked like a person sleeping tranquilly. The marks of her wounds had entirely disappeared, and this our surgeon could not but attribute to a miracle. That good man, who had attended us for so many years, had a special esteem for her virtue, and latterly, during her illness, he said, "Sister Bénigne is a real Mother of the house, and would have well deserved to bear that title."

It was on Wednesday, the 5th of November, 1692, at eight o'clock in the evening, that we witnessed the end of the holy life of this venerable sister, at the age of seventy-seven years, five months, and fifteen days, of which she had passed fifty-seven years in religion, as a humble lay-sister, which was no doubt a privilege granted by God to her humility, notwithstanding the frequent intentions that had been formed of giving her the black veil.

As she had often foretold, her death took place in the twenty-third week after Pentecost, on the Sunday of which the Gospel relates the story of that woman who only wished to touch the hem of the Saviour's garment that she might be healed, and who won that praise from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom, *Fides tua te salvam fecit*, with an encouragement to confide in His goodness. Every time Bénigne heard these words,

she felt a sweet joy, and after she was given the obedience to speak to me, she begged me to say often, when I met her, *Confide filia*, &c. We think we have good reason to hope that faith sustained this just one, as the pure love of God perfected, fortified, and consumed her.

There was not one of us who did not feel at once penetrated by a devout attraction to invoke this pure soul, even at the time when the last duties which the Church commands were being rendered to her.

She was carried down to burial on the evening of Thursday, but as twenty-four hours had not yet passed, she was left uncovered till eight o'clock on Friday morning. Then our honoured Mother went down to see her with some of the sisters, and I was one of the number. We found her so beautiful, and inspiring so much devotion, that we could hardly resolve to let her coffin be closed.

What pain it was to us to be obliged thus to hide the mortal remains of that beloved Sister !

Her memory could not be effaced in this house, which she had so much edified by her labours and virtue. She seemed to be still present amongst us, and yet we sensibly felt the loss of the consolation it was to us all to approach her, to speak a word to her, or to receive one of her salutations, which were often coupled with some little act of kindness. She is still the subject of our pleasantest conversations. Every one recounts how they had recourse to her protection in their needs. Our pupils do the same, and several

of them believe they have received many graces by it. Those among them who are already settled in the world, and other ladies, are eager to read her life, and ask if we shall not have it printed. She is regretted by all in Turin, and people often say to us, "Pray hard to your saint to assist us in heaven, as she did on earth, in our public calamities and afflictions."

Two years ago, several persons would not quit Turin when it was threatened with a terrible siege; and their confidence was founded on the words of this holy Sister, who had assured them that no harm would come to the city.

It is a sort of miracle to see this general knowledge and esteem of a person who appeared to be so hidden and unknown, especially for the last twenty years; and it increases our confidence that the Divine Spouse has at length crowned His gifts to this pure soul, by admitting her into the number of the virgins who follow the Lamb in the abode of eternal bliss.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HER SENTIMENTS AND PRACTICES WITH REGARD TO THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES.



HAVE hitherto scarcely mentioned the beauty of the graces and favours which Bénigne received from the divine munificence; but before I enter into that marvellous detail, as I propose to do in the second part of this book, I think it well

to terminate this part with the recital of her virtues; and beginning with faith, the foundation of all the others, I will give first her own words. "I must remember," she said, "that the three acts of pure faith are these: to believe in God, to believe God, and to trust in God; that His attributes are, to be stable, immutable, and firm in His substance; we must neither deny it, nor doubt it, nor search into it too deeply, but simply follow its footsteps. I must seek for support only in the virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, and in co-operation with His grace. Jesus has made known to me that a soul which through pure faith sacrifices itself to advance the interests of God, and immolates itself to His honour and His glory, acquires many graces, merits, and rewards, since it thus acknowledges God to be worthy of all praise, and of all homage.

"O God! with this pure light of faith, what marvellous pleasure has my soul taken in stripping itself of all things, and in labouring to destroy itself in order the better to adore and honour its Sovereign Lord!

"Faith has always preceded my hope; it has shown me with admirable clearness what I ought to hope for, and what to fear, but among those objects of fear nothing is more frightful to me than sin. It also encourages me to surmount the difficulty that must be encountered to attain to God, the infinite source of all good. I know that I owe to faith the knowledge of eternal truth, as I owe to hope and love the possession of it and all supernatural happiness.

"Yes, I know that he who believes in God cannot know Him well without loving Him, and I cannot love Him without easily believing in so perfect a friend as God is to me.

"My soul shall not let a day pass without making acts of faith and adoring the Divine Majesty by profound humiliation; in retiring within myself to make this act I have often been raised in spirit to the bosom of the adorable Object of my belief. I then took special and continual care to follow faithfully the light of faith, and to annihilate my own. God wills that I should, by the same faith, subject to Him the graces He bestows upon me; that I should believe them, that I should confide in Him, depriving myself of too sensible spiritual pleasures, and of the slightest satisfaction to my nature. He has over and over again made known to me that to believe perfectly in Him is to place in Him all that we are, and all our hopes; that perfect confidence in God is never separated from true and pure faith, which are ever side by side in the soul."

We may then say boldly that in the soul of Bénigne the virtue of faith was great, that it was solid and divine, purified from all thought of self, and quite simple and pure.

It showed itself especially in her reverence for God, in her perseverance in well-doing, in her inviolable fidelity to divine love amid the greatest difficulties and the most trying sufferings. It was evident, as she assured me, that she rested firmly on God alone

and on Jesus Christ, and not on her own intelligence. But her faith was most striking in her devotion to the most holy Sacrament of the altar, in her humility in approaching the sacrament of penance, in her gratitude to God for having caused her to be born in a Christian land, and made her a child of holy Church in baptism; she solemnized the anniversary of that grace with holy joy and especial devotion. The sign of the cross was her remedy for every ill, and her means of obtaining every good; she never made it without having first lifted up her heart to God, especially when she took holy water, in the virtue of which she had a holy and complete belief and confidence. She took it in all the places where it is kept, which are very numerous in our houses; it was her practice to fortify herself with it on going in and out of her cell, to efface by its means all her stains and impurities that were contrary to pure love. Faith also animated all her devotions, above all urging her to gain indulgences with care and fidelity. It was her lively faith that gave her the recollection with which she entered the choir, and remained kneeling there as motionless as a statue, going through the holy ceremonies with an angelic demeanour and so profound a reverence that it was evident that God was present to her mind and heart. And she was not only devout herself, but she inspired with the utmost reverence those who beheld her in that holy place; in short, everything about her testified to her great and lively faith.

Her hope was equally strong. I will describe it in her own words. "Oh! how good it is for me to adhere to God!" she often said, "to place all my hope in Him with that king who was after the Heart of the immortal King, and to look for all good from the Sovereign Good. The infinite loving-kindness of the Beloved of my soul, who prevents me every moment with His graces, requires from me this sweet hope! What evil can I fear, and what good may I not hope for, while I place my confidence in God? I find Him everywhere ready to assist me; at whatever time I turn to Him I shall, sinner as I am, find Him turned towards me. One of His prophets tells me so, and Love Himself assures me that His eye is ever upon me and towards me. Jesus Christ certifies me that I subsist in Him as my Head, what can I fear? There is no power in the world that can drive me out of His presence and snatch me out of His Bosom, provided I am faithful to His grace; nothing, in short, can deprive me of the happiness of belonging to Him, so that I need fear nothing in the world but sin, which has that miserable power. The Lord is the helper, the refuge, and the love of my heart! He is every moment before me, saying, Look at me and hope in me in all thy ways."

This devout Sister had no doubt learnt this lesson in the school of the evangelical prophet. That we may obtain much from God we must speak little, but hope firmly; in reverent silence and total self-abandonment to Divine Providence the soul must lift

itself up to God to establish its hope in Him. "This virtue," she said, "exacts from me perfect submission, total subjection, and continual dependence and adherence to the Will of this God of love; Love Himself gives the sure expectation of the good that He promises." Once God bestowed on her soul an incomprehensible grace by these interior words, which His love pronounced in the ear of her heart: "Bénigne, fear not; where I am there shalt thou be also. It is a wrong to my merciful love to be fearful for thy salvation after so many graces that I bestow on thee, and so many proofs of love that I give thee; that one which thou hast received of seeing me even in this life, as far as I can be seen, ought to make thee hope, my Bénigne, that this is only a fore-taste of the glory I am preparing for thee. Hope this from my bounty, expect it from the love of a Spouse who, as if impatient to possess thee eternally in Heaven, has so often shown Himself to thee on earth."

Whenever God had made known to her an event or a truth, by His interior words, she hoped for it firmly and without hesitation, never doubting that it would certainly happen at the promised time. She was far from faltering in her hope, and she gave great proofs of this to her Superiors on many occasions, assuring them in the midst of evident perils of war, pestilence, &c., that they would have nothing to fear; and the result always fulfilled her promises.

On the subject of her charity, that queen of

virtues, I can say but little because I have too much to say. Her love of God was pure and admirable, and I do not think I go too far in calling it seraphic; for I could not find words to express its perfection; it was ardent, zealous, long-suffering, patient, enduring, strong, languishing, complacent, kind, gentle, humble, submissive, courageous, in fact quite perfect, seeking only God Himself, who is Love. "Ah!" she said, "God has prevented me with an eternal love without anything on my part having preceded this charity; He well deserves that I should love Him, and if God deserves my love I wish to love Him; I will love Him in all things, I will love Him in Himself and out of Himself, in His creatures, in His severity, in His sweetness, in His magnificence, in my privations, contradictions, censures, in oppression of heart and joy of soul, in His abundance as well as in my poverty, in His profusion and in my indigence, in the possession of Him, and in His apparent absence. I will love God in His brightness and his beautiful light as my Sun; I will love Him in my dark and obscure nights, considering myself as truly nothingness, and in that chaos I will love my God; I will love His divine caresses, I will love His punishments. I love Him, yes, I love Him when He guides me, when He afflicts and corrects me; I love His yoke, I love His commands, I love His law, I love His reign; I love Him in subjection and in the sweet liberty He gives me of loving Him, I love Him in everything, everywhere, as my all, all love!"

The following is her own account of the means God gave her of attaining to this perfect charity. "I cannot love and honour God better than by doing everything with a view to His glory, and conforming myself to the life of His Son who is the life and the truth ; I must not deceive myself, I must follow Him to imitate Him ; my works must be full of light ; charity made Him become man, it ought to make me in some way divine by uniting me to God. My soul, when it enters into God, certainly finds itself in a holy darkness, knowing nothing because of the distance between the Creator and the creature ; but in this darkness I find a brilliancy which penetrates, animates, and inflames me. God treats me as a spouse ; the purity of love binds us together and unites us by a grace that is not only sanctifying, but if I might dare to say so, as if beatifying, which makes my soul melt in Him and in His immensity ; and there it enjoys a peaceful repose by means of love, which obliges me to confess that the union is no longer maintained by any act or movement of my own, but by the sole sight and enjoyment of God Himself."

The desire that God so often testified to her soul to be loved by it made so deep an impression on Sister Bénigne, that she often wished to die in order to love Him more perfectly. The world was an object of contempt to her ; nothing could console her except divine charity.

"O God !" she said, "what delight it would be to

see love in its source, but I have been told 'Thou seest enough to know, thou knowest enough to enjoy ; and thou enjoyest too much, not to love God and His sufficiency very much.' Ah ! before that Majesty I am but nothingness. And yet God communicates Himself, He imparts Himself by His grace and in His grace ; He imprints Himself in the soul by love, and a single touch of His holiness fills it with true happiness. O my God ! how great and how lavish is Thy goodness ! The abundance of Thy grace and love is like a mortal blow which love alone can enable us to survive !

"Jesus teaches me to love and to honour the majesty of a God dying on a Cross, and making Himself almost every moment a victim under the sacramental species, in order to offer a permanent sacrifice on our altars by this sovereign existence.

"Love would have consumed my life, had not God preserved it for His glory. Oh ! power of my God, which gives me the power and the grace to love Him, and which renders His gifts so durable in His poor creature ! He visits me, He consoles me, He nourishes me with His Holy Body ; His graces are redoubled, poured out, and heaped up with profusion, when He finds me empty of self."

"Let us learn," she says in other writings, "that nothing avails before God but what proceeds from love, and that nothing counts but what is done from the sole motive of love ; it is love that is my interior and perfect joy. To know God, and to love Him, is to

possess supreme felicity ; there is no repose but in love ; love has become, as it were, my very life and substance, so sweetly does it flow into my soul.

“The proof of my love is in seeing whether I fear to displease God, whether I hate and flee from sin in myself and in others, whether I am ready to quit all, to do all, to suffer all for this love. I believe it is this divine charity that makes me take such pleasure in my sufferings, and endure them so patiently. I trust in God as in a perfect friend ; but the love I bear Him makes me weep over the slightest infidelity, which I consider an enormity, seeing the immense bounty He has shown me. My tears feed love, and my faithful correspondence reassures it ; the pain of dying to myself is followed by the pleasure of living in love and by love.

“When I was once in ecstasy, I learnt that the heart which above all things fears to displease God and to offend Him, attracts Him powerfully into itself ; that if this soul is also faithful in desiring with firm determination never to commit the smallest deliberate sin, it will taste the sweetness of His love, which will speak to it interior words, and will satisfy its just desires.”

I have found, in many of her notes, these words often repeated : “O Lord, my Love ! take all things else from me, but never take from me either Thy love or the desire to be pleasing to Thee.”

She thus describes the effects of divine charity upon a heart : “A soul that loves is never distracted from

God. If it has perfect charity, nothing can hurt it ; all things tend to its profit and greater perfection. Charity is a participation of God, a divine infusion, and a supernatural gift of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; in short, it is a perfect friendship between God and His creature, His unworthy Bénigne ; it is a sweet union between God and my soul. I believe that it is Love who gives me these instructions, at least His interior voice has told me so, and also made me that sweet promise that if I love, if I hope, if I believe perfectly, I shall receive from Him, even in this life, all the graces that I can hope for ; that the mind which has the most pure intentions believes most firmly, hopes most securely, and loves most ardently and perfectly."

This loving soul once complained to her Spouse Jesus that she thought she was only amusing herself with gathering in His vineyard the remains of the fine grapes which her sisters gathered by handfuls ; but Love, who banishes all fear, answered her : " No, no, Bénigne, it is not so, thou drawest from my beautiful vineyard and from me who am that precious cluster of Cyprus in the vineyards of Engaddi, the new wine that brings forth pure souls ; and to convince thee of this truth, I will for the love of thee give a religious vocation to several maidens who will come to follow me in thy footsteps, my Bénigne ;" and this in fact took place. Another time her Love told her that her faith honoured His power by leaning upon it ; that her hope honoured the Word in Jesus Christ, since it relied on

His grace and on the merits of His death ; that her love honoured the Holy Ghost, since she loved only with a pure love, founded upon His infinite goodness ; that if faith gave her knowledge, that knowledge led her to love, and that love in its turn made her believe in the words of her Beloved ; that if hope made her hope for great things, love made her love still more Him who would impart them to her ; and in short that love bound her to love, to conformity and union with the beloved Object. “ Ah ! ” she said, “ now I understand that saying of St. Augustine, that faith opens the door, and hope makes me enter in ; but I add, like him, that without charity all is nothing, and my soul would be but a faulty queen in the eyes of her royal Spouse.”

Our Sister Bénigne always lived a life of love, since she never was stained by mortal sin, as all her confessors testify ; and she innocently declared to me that she did not think she had even committed any voluntary venial sins during the whole course of her religious life. “ O God ! ” she often used to say, “ voluntary sins ! I do not think I committed any even in the world. To displease God voluntarily and deliberately ! To do that in the slightest matter would be a horrible crime : no, no, I hope through the goodness of God that such a misfortune never befell my soul.” After this protestation may we not be permitted to assert that this chosen soul remained ever in charity ; and in God who is charity, since she never lost her love, and by a necessary consequence God must have incessantly

dwelt in her soul and preserved her baptismal innocence.

Divine charity rendered her life a continual course of good actions, which proved in the sight of God that virtue to be fertile and fruitful in her. We can easily conceive the merit of that queen of all virtues in her soul, and the miraculous hundredfold which her Spouse gave her in return, if we remember what she quitted for love of Him. She quitted the world, her prospects, her relations, her parents, and her country, to enter religion in a foreign land ; in religion she quitted honour, esteem, and also what was becoming to her station, by taking the rank of a lay-sister ; she quitted herself by consecrating herself to God ; she quitted her ease, by making herself like a servant in the house of her Spouse ; she absolutely quitted all pleasure by complete mortification ; she quitted the faculties of her soul by her secret vows. She even quitted as it were God Himself for obedience, refusing the abundance of His graces ; she quitted the enjoyment of the most holy happiness by the sacrifice she made of herself to divine justice ; she also deprived herself of her spiritual goods, of the merits of her good works, in favour of those to whom God might be pleased to apply them, and who were for the most part persons and nations unknown to her ; she gave up her body, taking no care of it, depriving it of everything, and even destroying it by her penances. We may say, in short, that she carried her charity to the highest point, delivering herself up to love so as to bear in

herself, as we shall see, the impression of a loving share in the sufferings and Passion of Jesus Christ her Spouse. "Ah!" she said, "to what a degree of renouncement must a soul attain who knows and feels that love deprived the Eternal God of His well-beloved Son, and deprived of life that only begotten Son, eternal like His Father! It is this that obliges me to sacrifice my life to Him again and again; too happy shall I be if I can lose it by suffering, lose it by dying a death like His, very bitter, but all for love!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HER SENTIMENTS AND PRACTICES TOUCHING THE THREE ORDINARY VOWS OF RELIGION.

THE three theological virtues are the support of the Christian, and the three vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience are the basis of religious perfection. On this subject, Sister Bénigne wrote thus: "The first step of my religious perfection should be the abandonment of everything that can impede a generous soul in advancing and rising to a state of perfection. The second step should be the renouncement of all that can be an obstacle to the perfection of pure and divine love, of all that can prevent the divine union and turn away the soul from its Sovereign Object; lastly, the third step of supreme perfection subdues and perfectly unites the will of the soul that loves God, to that of its only Good."

"I often renew my vows," she said, "and by this practice, which is much approved by my confessors, I receive fresh intimations of the perfection they contain ; and I even see that there is nothing perfect, nor any means of perfecting the soul which is not to be found in the practice of them ; their perfection even comprises my secret vows, the observance of which serves only to make me observe them better. Yes, I have tried to render subject to God the three powers of my soul ; first, by the vow of poverty, I have made myself the slave of Divine Providence ; by that of chastity, I have become the happy captive of His love ; and lastly, by vowing obedience, I have deprived myself not only of my liberty, but also of the power of ever regaining it.

"I must often consider and weigh the perfect practice of my holy vows, and remember that I have made by them an irrevocable gift to God of my body, of my temporal goods, of my will, my inclinations, affections and desires, and that it is only by means of this that I am a nun.

"I will love, I will adore, I will hope in Jesus, I will live in Jesus ; Jesus will be in me and I shall be in Jesus ; Jesus loves me, and for love of Jesus I will be poor, obedient, and chaste. I have asked God whether anything on earth could hurt me in this state ; and His love answered me by these interior words : ' No, my spouse, on the contrary, my grace will cause everything to be of use to thee according to my designs and my good pleasure in thee, upon thee, and

for thee.' ” She afterwards adds, “ I have learnt that God loves nothing so much as a heart dead to self, and that nothing gives Him more glory than such a heart when it no longer exists but in His divine Will.”

Let us pass on to her sentiments and acts with regard to each of the vows of religion, giving faithfully the expressions of this servant of God. “ The poverty of a holy religious, according to the lessons taught me by Jesus, must be in the mind, in the desires, and in the powers of the soul, in the affections of the heart, in the knowledge of the understanding, in the love of the will, and in everything that relates to the body. We must at first renounce whatever might turn us back towards an imperfect life ; when this evangelical virtue which we have embraced by vow has arrived at its perfection in a soul, it delivers it from all spiritual temptation, it removes all impediment to a perfect life, it disposes it to live as it were a divine life and reduces it to living lovingly crucified.”

We may say that the poverty of this devout Sister was such as love had taught her, and that it wrought in her all its holy effects. Her attention to the exterior practice of this virtue was extraordinary, especially in her assiduity at work, for she lost no time, and dared to employ but very little in writing down by obedience her divine favours, for fear of taking it from her spinning, in imitation of the seraphic St. Theresa. She showed it also in the care she took of everything that was under her charge. “ No,” she said, “ my

frugality in my domestic offices, and the care I took to keep and to spare everything, was not owing to any fear that I should be in want of anything ; I was too fully convinced by experience of the goodness of my Lord Jesus, and I had too much faith in His word, to doubt that He would provide me with all I needed ; but it was merely and simply in order better to practise holy poverty, especially in the ten or twelve first years of the foundation, when the house was so poor, that I took care to save every penny for the Sister dispenser."

She used to sift the corn herself, and without assistance to carry it up to the granary and down again, to spare the expense of a labourer ; she alone changed the wine with immense fatigue, passing whole nights in that labour. Once a quantity of very fine wheat having been put into a newly built gallery, it bred such a number of large white worms that the Superior and Sister dispenser thought it was entirely spoilt. They called Sister Bénigne, who on seeing this was much grieved at their want of confidence ; she strengthened her own, without saying another word except that it must be moved immediately ; but as all this happened during Matins, the Sister dispenser said they would send for some men early in the morning ; and she and the Mother Superior went to bed with regret, seeing all the corn already spoilt. After every one was gone, Bénigne took with her our good Sister Marie Marthe Meglié, and made a sign to her that they must work that night at carrying all the corn

into another gallery ; that Sister began to laugh, thinking they would not be able to do much, but as she was very devoted to the good of the house, she did not refuse the labour, and they both set to work. Marthe has often assured me that though her own work got on well, that of Bénigne got on more than twice as fast, and before four o'clock in the morning this enormous quantity of corn was transported into another place and freed from all the worms, as if there had never been any. We did all this heavy work, the Sister said, without noise and without feeling any fatigue ; for my part I seemed to be amusing myself pleasantly. The Sister dispenser went the first thing in the morning to look at the corn, and see the damage she expected to find done to it. But to her great astonishment she found it in good condition, and could hardly believe her eyes, since four strong men would not easily have done so much work in so short a time. She went directly to give the news to the Superior, who thanked God for it, and sending for the humble Bénigne, asked her with what dispositions she had done such a work, and what instinct had urged her to it. " Alas ! Mother," she humbly said, " I thought it would be a shame for me, a poor servant, to leave to the men that temporal gain by which I could merit a purely spiritual one ; and that a miser would not have put off the work till the next day, even if it was to save but a single measure of wheat from being spoilt by worms ; and that I ought not, in the spirit of poverty, to be less zealous in preserving what belonged

to God." As to its being entirely freed from the worms, she attributed it solely to the sign of the cross, and to the blessing the Mother Superior had given her the evening before. Many other times God blessed the spirit of poverty of this His humble handmaid. The same spirit animated her on all occasions, and made her shun all indulgence, allowing her only to take, out of obedience, what was actually necessary.

It was one of her greatest consolations to see that the sisters of the dear Community of Turin were so anxious to maintain that spirit of poverty which was so carefully inculcated by our first Mothers, her honoured companions in the foundation; she never saw the sisters carrying wood to the fire or employed in any other work for the community, without a look or a word of kindness, saying, "Oh! how pleasing your work is to the Spouse, and how it glorifies our holy Founders."

As to the chastity of Sister Bénigne, that heavenly virtue which she possessed in so eminent a degree, it shone forth in her whole person and made her such as our Constitution requires; for this chaste virgin lived and breathed for the Heavenly Spouse alone, in all purity, cleanness, and holiness of spirit, words, demeanour, and action.; an angel could not have been more pure in an assumed mortal body, than she was in her real one, formed of clay.

Sister Jeanne Bénigne, indeed, realized in its fulness the idea given us by our holy Founder of a chaste and true religious, living like an angel among men, as if

she were already in heaven. Her special attraction was to love and adore the sanctity of God. "Alas!" she said, "next to the beautiful justice of my God, His holiness is the adorable object of my affections, and I may say that Divine Love has been pleased so to favour me with His graces, and to martyrize me by supernatural pains, that He has rendered me, as it were, insensible in my human nature, even to the most innocent pleasures, such as the enjoyments bestowed by God Himself; so that I have no longer any end or aim but Him alone."

In one of her notes she writes—"Shall I say, to Thy glory, O Lord Jesus, that the poorest, the most vile and abject of creatures had recourse to Thee, to be freed from the fear she felt of her natural inclination to find sensible pleasure in the friendship and conversation of creatures; and that after she thus had recourse to Thy love, Thou didst give her the grace to deprive herself of all satisfaction, to be no longer attached to anything sensible, nor through the senses, and to be, as it were, dead in body, heart, and mind to all that is of the earth. I have been taught that to contravene my angelic vow requires the consent of the thoughts and of the will; but holy and pure Love, proceeding farther, like a more learned Teacher, has taught me not to stop there, but to pass from all things to God, and from God to all creatures, turning away my thoughts and heart from everything that is not Him; thus love has made me reach such a strength of love, that there is no longer anything

that can arrest or occupy me, however simple and innocent may be the object offered to my mind or my sight."

Let us now see what were her sentiments on obedience. "This vow," she says, "extends to everything prescribed by observance, and binds me interiorly as much as externally; all my exercises must depend upon it, spiritual and temporal; even mutual charity is comprised in it, since it is recommended to us twice a day by the Superior; and to this must be added whatever is told me for my direction. The inspirations and impulses of grace also belong to my obedience, for certainly the more faithful I am to them, the more perfectly I obey; the more I give to God, the more I sacrifice to His dominion my own reasonable being, the spiritual and intellectual powers of my soul, my own possessions, above all, my affections and my love. This great vow should make me receive the lights and instructions of others without contradiction or murmur. I must submit in profound peace, seeking no other satisfaction. It seems to me that I do so, and that my heart reposes in this calm. A soul that is truly obedient, as I desire to be, is like a queen sitting on her throne, submissive not only to the will, but to the designs and good pleasure of her Divine and Sovereign King, who is all love for her, and who has Himself willed to be obedient unto death. I must remember that the more lowly and remote from my own choice is the thing commanded, the more I must seek my merit in the excellence of this exalted virtue.

"I must be very faithful in remembering that I must never, under pretext of humility, ignorance, or poverty, refuse to do anything I may be ordered to do, even if it is honourable, because submission to the Will of God is preferable to any other act of virtue.

"I have been reprov'd by my Love," she frequently says in her notes, "for having so long delayed to write down His graces, from a sense of my misery, and from the idea that it was useless trouble, thinking that no one would ever have patience to read them, were it only because of the poorness of my expressions, and the weariness they would feel of my repetitions, and of the confusion of the subjects, for they were written without method, as I have said elsewhere, in order that the difficulty of understanding them might hinder our sisters from wishing to see them."

But although she was much embarrassed, and very reluctant to fulfil this duty, she yet overcame herself sufficiently to do it with precision to the end, for she had no other will than that of God and her Superiors.

We may also remark that she had never any other direction than theirs, and followed no advice but that of the ordinary confessors, except that for a little time she was under the direction of Father Baratte, a Jesuit, by command of our Mother Jeanne Augustine Machet; but he himself placed her again under the direction of the same Mother, and our late beloved Mother de Lucinge.

This true spouse of Jesus often received sublime lights on those words of the Gospel for Easter Monday ;

that Jesus was known in the breaking of bread.* "Alas!" she said, "how much I have desired that my bread should be always broken for me, that I might better know the will and the designs of God upon me." To obtain this grace, she practised extraordinary devotion and submission to her Superiors, especially to one who tried her somewhat, God permitting it for the profit of her soul. It would be too long to relate all that she told me she had done to persuade that Superior to put her back into the duties and subjections of a novice. I read in her notes, "I will submit to all my Superiors, without distinction, with the greatest interior perfection and outward respect that is possible to me, keeping in mind the submission of Jesus to His Father."

"In my manifestation this month to our Mother," she says, "I have accepted the obedience she gave me to satisfy my neighbour as far as I possibly can in all that is just and reasonable; to take my little necessities without difficulty, with holy liberty of spirit. She has, besides, renewed the general permission I have always had, to watch at night as God wills, or my affairs require. It has happened to me again and again, that having passed the night in terrible pain, without a moment's repose, I have asked our Lord, when we were called in the morning, what it pleased Him that I should do. He instantly answered me, 'Rise, my daughter, go and make your meditation,

* St. Luke xxiv. 35.

or go and do such and such an obedience.' I obeyed this gentle order without hesitating a moment, and often a long discipline, which the Angel bade me take, served me as a remedy, and relieved all my sufferings, while at the same time I satisfied for the sins of other persons by that act of penance."

At the first stroke of the bell she withdrew from her highest raptures to fulfil all her duties of obedience. She was quite ready to burn all her papers written with so much labour, by desire of persons so illustrious and so well authorised, in obedience to others who, finding her so disposed to do it, afterwards forbade it, and were much edified by her humble submission.

She firmly resisted receiving divine favours, as we have said, out of obedience. "I will renounce," she said, "my own lights and opinions to make myself docile and submissive, after the example of my Lord Jesus Christ; I will often reflect that the Divine Saviour never did His own Will, that He was bound in swaddling clothes at His birth, and that He was subject to His parents when He grew older. I will do everything for love, like Him." How many tears did this humble Sister shed, simply for fear of having failed in obedience, although in trifling matters, or of not having perfectly followed out the intentions of her Superiors. She humbled herself with immense respect whenever she met them, bowing profoundly two or three times before she spoke to them.

When she was dispenser she always distinguished them, not by doing anything singular, but by little

attentions, such as taking care to give them the finest fruit, the best salad, the best bread, the nicest portion, the prettiest flowers on their napkin, and so on, according to her different offices. Being asked what was her intention in doing this, she answered, "If I had to serve Jesus Christ, and He had ordered me to give Him nothing more than to others, I must obey Him, but my love and respect would make me find out many ways of distinguishing Him; now, my Superior is my visible Jesus Christ on the earth, so I ought to treat her in the same manner. They give themselves anxiety and care for us all, is it not just that we should each in our own way show them our reverence and our tender gratitude?"

Her exact obedience and fulfilment of all our holy observances rendered her a living rule, and one might learn all the details of it by only seeing her; she never forgot the smallest practice, nor the least ceremony, even those that were seldom required.

It was a holy pleasure to hear her speak of the points of the highest perfection contained in our Rules, Constitutions, and Directory. "Oh!" she said, "how much do the Sisters of the Visitation lose, who do not become holy and perfect?" Nothing gave her more consolation than to see them faithful to these holy observances, without distinction of great and small, since they all equally delight the Heart of the Spouse.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL HER VIRTUES REFERRED TO THE TWELVE FRUITS OF THE HOLY GHOST—THE FRUITS OF CHARITY, JOY, PEACE, AND PATIENCE.

TO keep the order we have observed in speaking of her theological virtues and religious vows, we will first relate the feelings of Sister Bénigne with regard to those blessed fruits of the Holy Ghost with which she was so perfectly filled, and then pass on to her practice of them, which will show them in their full maturity.

“The love of God cannot be perfect,” she said, “without the love of our neighbour, and peace with our neighbour is one of the sweetest fruits of charity. Jesus Christ has several times said to me, ‘Remember, Bénigne, that I take care of all that concerns thee, but do thou on thy part have my interests at heart;’ and he taught me that He calls His interests the good of my neighbour and all that concerns him. He has often given me the injunction of the Apostle: ‘Bear the burden of thy brethren.’ I must also keep continually in mind the lessons of my blessed Fountress: ‘That if I do not love those who annoy and despise me, it follows that I must be proud; if I do not bear with those who afflict me, I am impatient; if I do not return the kindness of those who do good to me, I am ungrateful; and in short, if I fail with regard to any one, I have no true virtue.’ It has often happened to me that on pronouncing the least word

ever so little contrary to the love of my dear neighbour, my Love and my All no longer spoke a word to my soul. I once made a retreat to learn what I owed to my neighbour, and through the Heart of Jesus I saw that I owe him a love similar to the love of myself; that I owe him honour, respect, and service; that I must with humble deference let his will reign over my own; my position obliges me to this, and whatever it may cost me, I would sooner forget my own interests than his; I will also risk my happiness, if necessary, to secure his; I will never put forward anything I do for him; I will often entreat my sweet Jesus to lay his faults to my account before God His Father, and before creatures. I will place my sisters so high in God, as the first in the rank of my neighbours, that beside them I shall seem to be only an atom. I often lay down this law to myself: 'Bénigne, serve thy sisters, and expect nothing from them.' Charity must teach me to bend myself to everything; when God asks something of me, He never asks it by chance, but always with some special design of His providence and grace, therefore I must in everything and everywhere give Him my co-operation, and carry it as far as His love and His grace shall enable me; I must besides be very attentive to apply the merits of Jesus Christ to myself, and also to the soul of my neighbour.

"A little time before His death, my sweet Saviour assembled His disciples and said to them: 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.' The remembrance of these

gentle words one day touched me so much that they raised me to the Heart of Jesus, to complain of my little goodness, and that Heart replied to me: 'What grace couldst thou desire which thou hast not received? I have given thee my love, thou enjoyest my sweetness; what more dost thou require?' I answered, 'I still need the love of my neighbour, O my Saviour.' Upon which He said to me in His infinite loving-kindness: 'Ah, my Bénigne, if thou hadst not love for him, wouldst thou quit me so often as thou dost to serve him, leaving the enjoyment of me to go and suffer with him?' At other times He consoled me on this point, making me remark the joy I feel in seeing and knowing the graces He bestows on our sisters, which somewhat allayed my fears; but yet they return when I reflect how great is the perfection of love for our neighbour that God requires of us, since He limits it only by that which He Himself has for us. 'Love one another as I have loved you.'

"In short, true charity makes us regard all as members of one body, of which Jesus Christ is the Head. Oh! how would I treat my eyes, my arms, and my heart! I ought to look upon my neighbour as I do upon them. But to what a length ought this charity to go towards my sisters, with whom God, as well as His most Holy Mother, has still more specially united me by that secret visitation of grace of which my holy Founder speaks in one of his Constitutions! It is wonderful how God urges me to fulfil this second precept of the law of salvation and grace, and to what

a high degree of perfection in this charity He wills us to attain. In short, what could He say to me that would teach me more on this subject than these few words: 'Love one another, as my Father and I love each other?' O Jesus! who can attain to the sublimity of this divine love?"

She often said in a transport of charity, "Jesus Christ died for us; then I ought to die in the service or for the good of my neighbour, or at the very least I ought to suffer for him."

She never said a word to the disadvantage of any one, and she once owned to our Mother de Lucinge that God did not let her fall into that fault; that she occupied herself about her sisters only to console, to serve, or to please them, and that she never left her interior occupation with God to observe their imperfections. She loved them all without distinction, but in so amiable a manner that each one might think she was chosen as her best friend; she considered herself the friend and the servant of all, and as such she took pleasure in rendering every imaginable service to the community, especially in what related to her employments, and always with most attractive gentleness and care.

When she knew of any sisters not being well she went to warm their beds, and if they had not supped, she took them a cup of broth or some other little thing, which they often accepted merely to please her in return for her kindness, knowing that she had the necessary permission. When she was dispenser she

used to inquire of the sisters who waited whose portions those were that were not eaten, in order to inform the Mother Superior at the obedience, so that she might ascertain the state of their health ; sometimes she took charge of this herself, as we have said, asserting that our venerable Mother de Chantal had given her leave to console and relieve her dear daughters of Turin, saying that it was right sometimes even to forestal the needs of the sisters and their want of confidence by a free and sincere charity.

The poor also were well treated by this charitable Sister. She increased and took care of the remains destined for them with admirable neatness ; she never refused what was wanted for them, and was delighted when the portress allowed her to distribute the alms herself to those little ones of Jesus Christ, fully believing that she served Him in their persons. During the siege of Turin she multiplied her acts of charity, especially towards the soldiers who were wounded or attacked by fever. Very early in the morning she prepared large quantities of suitable food to be distributed to the sick poor, and this practice was long kept up. But who can describe what this victim of love suffered for her beloved neighbour ? what were her vigils, her fasts, her penances, were it only to obtain for him one hour's repose. We know that for this intention she passed whole nights kneeling with her arms outstretched in the form of a cross, knowing by experience that God refused her nothing that she asked in that crucified and crucifying position,

in which she was often raised from the ground, so that her feet being unsupported, she suffered more than by any other penance. I have myself surprised her in that state when I was ordered to make her speak; she owned to me that God had granted her numberless graces through this invention of love and mortification which she practised, especially when she knew that any of her sisters were extremely troubled in mind or in their agony. She would then withdraw to her cell or to some retired place to pray for the poor dying souls and for the departed, to relieve them in their purgatory, as we shall relate elsewhere.

She felt herself strongly urged by her charity to ask for that union of hearts which ought to exist among the daughters of the Visitation. "Alas!" she said, "how much we should be to be pitied if we were ever to fail in that union!" I know that she often tenderly caressed a person for saying that she took as much pleasure in the advantage and honour of her sisters as in her own, saying, "Oh, how happy will be the daughters of our Institute who have this feeling! Our good Father cannot, even in Heaven, endure self-interest, and I would rather die than hear that a daughter of that Saint had written or spoken evil of one of her sisters. It is certain that if the slightest ill was sent out the house, no good would ever come into it; if the sisters do not mutually take care of each other's honour and reputation, God will not bless them." I should make a volume full of admirable things if I related all she said to me on this subject,

with astonishing zeal and in words of marvellous force and efficacy.

The heart of this charitable Sister being so intent on doing good to her neighbour, she derived from it such a sweet interior satisfaction that she was evidently filled with the joy of the Holy Ghost. She often confessed to me that her whole being was so penetrated with that beautiful fruit of love that the world, with all its goods and pleasures, can offer nothing to be compared to the interior joy which the possession of God bestows on the heart. That unction of grace, and as it were divine joy, gave her an invariably affable and gracious air; and although her features had been disfigured in her childhood by the small-pox she remained always pleasing and attractive, and her devout manner was so holy and agreeable that it drew one to God.

This fruit of joy produced in her a perfect evenness of temper, the essence of which was the fulfilment of the good pleasure of God. This virtue, which was the characteristic of our blessed Founder, showed itself admirably in this humble Sister; in her illnesses, under painful remedies, in little contradictions, and under the burden of the many domestic employments which she often had at once, without being wearied by fatigue, discouraged by difficulties, or depressed by sufferings; for she was equally assiduous and persevering in doing all that she was ordered.

We find also these words in her writings: "Yes, O Lord, a single glance at Thy divine favour in

general, or at one of Thy perfections, fills me with blissful joy and anticipated happiness. The joy that God bestows on me and makes me take in Him, is neither disturbed nor interrupted by pains or contradictions; on the contrary, my heart is fortified by them, and when I procure them for myself, or when Providence favours me with them, I say cheerfully to my Lord Jesus Christ: 'Well, my Master, dost Thou will that I should suffer, and that I should take up arms to combat my enemies? I am ready, but be Thou my courage and my strength.' "

It was only while she suffered for the expiation of the sins of certain persons, whose salvation God had committed and granted to her, that her countenance was overshadowed by such extreme sadness that she could not be recognized; but in that state she inspired us with still greater respect, for the operation of grace in her was then so evident, that her sadness itself seemed to be something divine and worthy of admiration. Her very aspect showed that her heart was the throne of the Prince of Peace, and that her Sovereign Lord made her repose in the abundance of that sweet fruit of the Holy Spirit, as one whom His love had rendered wholly His.

She never appeared either slow or hurried, but always tranquil; and this made her most attentive to everything. Her great maxim was, that where God is present, there is holiness, and that the grace of that Divine presence enables us to forget nothing that may please Him; and this was always observable in her

conduct, more especially in the laborious offices of Martha, which did not distract her from the sweet occupations of Mary, for her unalterable peace united in her the two lives, active and passive. Her own pen explains still better the precious fruits of this peace. "I feel," she said, "diffused within me this peace which produces a most sweet interior feeling of the mercy of my God, ever beneficent, but, above all, towards poor Bénigne; so that I may say that in spite of my imperfection I feel as if freed from the disturbance of my passions, from the cares of my relations, from the sadness, griefs, and anxieties of the various events of life, and the repose and calmness of my soul are scarcely ever broken, not even by a first emotion.

"By this fruit of peace I honour in myself the work of grace, adoring the Divine Workman to whom I give all my feeble co-operation; in this state the soul gives the Spouse full liberty to act, offering no opposition to His marvellous effusions, to which the smallest disturbance is an obstacle. It is certainly a long time since I have felt any of those disturbances in my inmost heart; I hope that God, making His abode in it, is not disturbed by meeting with embarrassments or contradictions, or troublesome importunities, or even darkness and pains of soul, or other unforeseen events; the malicious spirit has sought in vain to cause them."

She adds in other writings these lessons which love had given her: "That true peace consists in patience, that patience to be perfect must be peaceful, and that

by peace and patience we more easily acquire perseverance, which gives us our crown. That in peace of heart, the spirit is more easily humbled, that the most humbled spirit is the most contrite, and that the heart which feels the most lively, loving, and peaceful contrition, is the most readily heard, for there is nothing that it cannot obtain from God. Moreover, my Divine Love has taught me that true peace consists in overcoming evil by good, that is to say, in doing all the good that is within our knowledge, and avoiding evil; but that in order to have perfect peace, we must do both for pure love, solely to please God."

The fruit of patience was so excellent and mature in this dear Sister, that it would require a separate treatise, but as we have already mentioned it several times, we will only say in a few words that she practised this virtue in her frequent illnesses, in her terrible interior pains, in that long series of crosses of all kinds and shapes which she had to endure, and in frequent contradictions which did not discourage her from rendering services to her neighbour. Her fears respecting the truth of her graces also gave her many occasions of practising it. The devil furnished her with terrible ones, and creatures did not spare her. Amid all these trials she was ever courageous and unmoved, and so careful not to be impatient, that she reckoned it a grievous fault to have been once vexed by a great annoyance.

She suffered the inclemency of the seasons without complaining, or making use of those words that are so

useless and yet so common. Oh, how cold! Oh, how hot! Oh, what a heavy rain! Oh, what a wind! She could not bear people to ask for changes of weather hastily, saying, "It seems we cannot let God make even one day as He pleases, and our impatience will not give Him time to do us a favour without our pressing Him for it." I often asked her how she could bear to be so long shut up in her cell, in the severe cold, as well as the great heat? She answered me smiling, "As for the cold, since it is exceedingly hurtful to my ailments, I relieve myself by obedience, and have a little fire since I have grown old; but I take no pains to protect myself from the heat, because it hurts only my immortification, without doing much harm to my health." Neither would the sweet patience of Sister Bénigne allow her to drive away from her face the flies and other insects that are so annoying in summer; she also underwent cruel operations in her illnesses, without shrinking or even showing that she felt them.

Let us add her description of this fruit of the tree of the cross. "I have been told," she says, "that when the carbuncle is tarnished by any accident, its former brilliancy is restored by steeping it in vinegar; so the heart that is animated by love and embellished by grace, regains its former beauty by holy patience in affliction and pain. Patience is an evident sign that the spirit is submissive to God, as impatience is a sign of our rebellion. Alas! O Lord, I firmly believe that where patience is wanting, fervour fails, and that as a

further misfortune, lukewarmness and sloth take its place. Yes, my soul, my Father St. Augustine teaches me that God created us by His power, but that He has willed to redeem us by taking a Body capable of suffering, and that on our part we cannot suffer profitably without patience. As all works lose their value without the spirit of love and charity, so there is no crown without final patience; it is what must open to us the gate of heaven, and give us eternal glory."

CHAPTER XXI.

SEQUEL OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTER.

FRUITS OF BENIGNITY, GOODNESS, LONGANIMITY, GENTLENESS.

THE name of Bénigne, which signifies beautiful flame, was perhaps given by our venerable Mother de Chantal to our dear Sister, as a presage of what she was one day to be, as well as in memory of her son, the Baron de Chantal, whose baptismal name it was.

Our holy Foundress said this sweet name suited her admirably, for the benignity of our Lord would in time be manifested in her; and God no doubt so ordained it to show that the pure and beautiful flame of His love was incessantly to shine in her heart.

The Serene Infanta Catherine of Savoy, of whom we have spoken, desired to give her her own name at her profession, but learning that she bore the name of

Bénigne, she would not have it changed, saying that was the one which really became her.

Her manners were most sweet and cordial; and since our holy Father St. Francis of Sales says that cordiality is not to be acquired by our own efforts, but is a gift of God, and the fruit of interior prayer, we may say that our dear Sister Bénigne learnt it in her loving familiarity with God, and from that infinite sweetness derived her way of treating with her sisters, so well adapted to the terms of the rule which directs us to show each other cordial honour, not only in words, but in deed and in truth; and which also orders us to be humble, gentle, cordial, and frank among ourselves. She spoke few words, but her silence and kind sympathetic manner attracted and consoled her neighbour, and gained her the affection of all.

She indulged our pupils, and conversed with them, using and allowing them to use terms of kindness and affection; they were all eager to oblige her, and thought themselves happy when she employed them in any way; but she never left them without having said some devout words, and given them some maxim of virtue, with winning gentleness. She did the same with the sisters, showing great interest in what concerned them or their relations, asking after them and assuring them of her prayers, especially in illness or anxiety. She often spoke of the obligations we are under to certain persons, in particular or in general, and never refused to do any service, or give any little pleasure, in her power.

Her goodness of heart was shown, above all, by her admirable skill in excusing the faults of her sisters. When she saw any of them in grief, she approached them with few words, but so tender that it was evident they came from a heart which was the abode of the God of all goodness; then she inquired into their state, their health, or anything that could be agreeable to them. "Ah!" she said, "I pray for many different objects, but my sisters are always the first that I present to God." Those of this Monastery came immediately after the Mothers of our holy House of Annecy; then she placed before God the interests of the three Monasteries of Lyons, the two first of Paris, that of Moulins, the first of Grenoble, those of St. Etienne, of Riom, Warsaw, Cracow, and Rome. Later she added that of Naples, for she had a happy presentiment of the progress it would make, and assured me that God would be well served in it, by a number of elect souls, chosen to attain to the high degree of perfection He requires from us.

She never ceased to bestow kindnesses, in spite of the slight but frequent annoyances that were the only return she received. Far from speaking of these contradictions permitted by God for the increase of her virtue, she would willingly have hidden them from herself to avoid the danger of having the least shadow of feeling contrary to the perfect charity with which, like her Divine Spouse, she covered the multitude of those slight faults committed against her. When she was Sister dispenser, she invented ways of her own to

serve the sisters according to their needs, skilfully concealing the little singularities which the state of each one might require, in order to spare them the confusion that a true religious feels at not being able to do without those little deviations from the community fare. "Alas!" she said, "our sisters are so good and so mortified that they are content with very little. I durst not display the little foolish things I give them." Yet the sisters who waited were vexed with her for these considerate devices, and for her repeated entreaties that they would not change the order of the portions, not being aware that there was more in one than another; but she never would justify herself on this point. When she had nothing particular to give to those whom she judged to be in want of more nourishment, she made a little sign of the cross over their portions, being sure, she told me, that our Lord would then supply for her, and that her sisters would never fare so well as on that little portion that had received the blessing of our Lord.

She prepared the portions with such care and neatness, that some thought she was rather long over her work; but she never seemed to know of the complaints they made, nor did a reproach for these little annoyances ever escape her lips. She used to say with great tenderness, "I would sooner complain of God to God Himself, than complain of my neighbour." The late Canon Gimelli, our confessor, a person of great piety and virtue, sent for her one day to reprove her for her slowness in serving the sisters at table; but when he

saw her kneeling before him, ready to receive his corrections with the utmost humility, he was unable to say a single word to her, having seen in her an aspect of such holiness, and of the dwelling of God in her soul, that he was quite confused, and would rather have imposed a good mortification on those who had made so unreasonable a complaint against this good servant of God. "She seemed to me," he said, "so near dying, that I wonder she can fulfil so heavy an office at all, not that she should do it rather slowly."

The precious fruit of longanimity seemed to be born with her, for when she took up any practice of piety or perfection, it was always for life, and she never varied during the fifty-seven years of her religious life. She was ever a nun of exalted virtue, mortified, persevering in good, courageous in suffering, always faithful in corresponding with the designs of God in her regard; she never withdrew herself from His divine operations, nor retracted her act of abandonment to His good pleasure; she never omitted the sacrifices which love induced her to make, that she might immolate her whole self to His justice; she endured with intrepidity and with a peace of mind always even and submissive, so many agonising pains and a sort of daily death, without ever considering her own interest or pleasure, and this from the first step she took out of the world in the House of God, confessing, however, that the weight of the divine favours was the most difficult to bear, because it requires the unceasing subjection of the soul to the motions and opera-

tions of grace, and the continual separation from self; yet this is what she did without interruption during so long a period. She often said to me, "Alas! how much love makes one suffer! It is a sweet tyrant that spares not the heart which is under its control. Our holy Founder was right in saying that a soul which possesses this love and is possessed by it, must live in patience, but that this patience must itself be lifelong."

Without any change in her conduct, this humble Sister had been in the beginning and for a long time after, praised and consulted upon everything that was done in the house; esteemed by our venerable Mother de Chantal and by our first Mothers, tenderly loved by all the first sisters of this house, supported by the first confessors, above all by M. Truital, who died confessor of our first Monastery of Annecy; approved by many great religious, by Archbishops and Bishops, with whom she was made to confer on her sublime states; caressed by her late Royal Highness Christina of France, and by the three Princesses her daughters; honoured by all their attendants, who revered her as a saint, and conversed more with her than with any other Sister; but for the last twenty years she had experienced a complete change in the conduct of God in her regard, and lived as it were buried in her cell, which would have been like a grave to her, had not God often rendered it a paradise by His divine presence.

She never came out of that little abode except to

put in order the community-room, and in winter for the time required to make the fire in it ; thus she lived deprived of all external support and of all intercourse, for even her Superiors spoke to her but little of her interior, and the confessors could scarcely comprehend her, from the difficulty she had in speaking freely on the subject of her graces.

Her constancy was also remarkable under the strange maladies which reduced her to extreme weakness ; but her desire of suffering was not satisfied, and she was often only relieved from those agonies by the redoubled intensity of her pure love. She endured these painful states as if they had been the joys of her early youth, without interrupting her peace or her silence. She had so accustomed herself to speaking little, that one might sometimes have thought she had lost the power of it, liking a life hidden and retired in God, who chooses to be called a hidden God. It was chiefly in the secret recesses of her heart that she abandoned herself to the wounds of love of her Beloved, although she felt them frequently amid the busiest offices of Martha. Our honoured Sister Péronne Marie Belin, who was considered by all a holy Sister, often said on hearing the graces of our five first Mothers spoken of, "Our Mother de Châtel was once wounded by an arrow of the Divine Archer ; but I believe Sister Jeanne Bénigne has been so more than twenty times in my presence. As I was often her aid in her offices, she could not hide herself from me, and I saw her often fainting with pain and love like a beloved spouse, at times

looking all on fire, at other times quite pale and as if dying. It moved my compassion," added that good Sister, "to see her obliged to attend to her domestic duties, although the effects of these graces lasted in her soul all the four-and-twenty hours, and she could hardly speak, whatever efforts she made. I know not either on what she lived in those happy times, but her great care was to hide her holy favours under the veil of persevering humility."

Having to speak of the eighth fruit, which is gentleness, I cannot separate it from humility, especially as our holy Founder chose those two dear virtues of the Divine Heart of Jesus Christ to be the basis of our beloved and holy Institute. Our gentle and humble Bénigne practised them both in imitation of her Spouse Jesus. There can be no doubt that she possessed them in an eminent degree, since the Spirit of God reposed in her till the moment when He transported her soul into the land of the living, as we have reason to hope.

She had so low an opinion of herself that it drew tears from my eyes to hear her speak of her miseries, which she thought so horrible. "All negligence in spiritual things," she said, "is a grave fault; if the good that we neglect is necessary to us, it is an enormous idleness; and this vice is so low and so unworthy of a heart wherein pure and divine love reigns, that the soul infected by it is certainly beginning to fail in that love. But where I myself am in this respect, O my God! and how great a risk do I run of being myself reduced to so deplorable a state! I

who sometimes distract myself with work that I may be less open to the sudden impressions of grace, because they greatly oppress and overwhelm my poor body ! I who relax from time to time my attention to what God wills from me, that I may not be so continually occupied by it, and who do not always execute it faithfully, especially when I fail to write down His graces, which His goodness so vehemently urges me to do. The Beloved of my soul commands me, He presses me to act, and I do not sufficiently oblige Him to do all that He has promised me, because of my base ingratitude which I try to cover with the veil of humility, and excuse myself from writing them down under pretext of finding myself unworthy of His mercies ; I often say to Him, O Eternal Wisdom, the reality of Thy graces is shown by a prompt amendment, and by a marvellous progress in true virtue ; I find nothing of the kind in Thy poor Bénigne, she is but a foul pond stagnating in her imperfections. It is not without reason that they wish to try my way of life ; I fear lest it be tortuous, and lest I should profane the wonderful bounty bestowed on me by Thy goodness, since I am wanting in good works, and I do not yet know how to make a good use of the means God gives me of perfecting myself as a true daughter of the Visitation. Alas ! if I had all the most sublime graces of God, and had not the virtue required by my own vocation, my Love, who is infallible Truth, tells me I have nothing ; the highest perfection being comprised in my holy Constitutions, and in my beloved

Directory." Sometimes Bénigne would say to me, even before she had been ordered to speak to me, "God is always enriching me with His mercies, and I am always impoverishing myself by not getting rid of my miseries! I wish to do right, but I see that the more I advance in age the more I need assistance in practising it. I know, O my Lord, that Thou lovest a sinful soul that is humble, better than a proud devout one, this consoles me when I see that I have good reason to abase myself and none to exalt myself. I will endeavour then to win my cause at the feet of Thy Divine Majesty by profound humility, loving humiliation, abasement, and contempt, and those from whom it comes to me as my best secret friends and benefactors. My God teaches me that the true touchstone to discover whether the heart is truly humbled, is its humble submission to His good pleasure under suffering."

She took singular care to conceal her graces and her sublime favours; she often said to me that she had been many times consoled by the little account that was made of such extraordinary things in the Visitation, because it would have been a martyrdom to her to think that any attention was paid to her. She took so many precautions that her raptures were but very seldom seen, for when she perceived in herself certain tendencies to them, she retired to her cellars or to remote places, that she might thus give herself up entirely and without witnesses to the effects of grace, and be carried by it as high as its force required.

But if, on the one hand, she concealed her graces with holy jealousy, on the other she still more carefully made known her defects. She would have wished to find new expressions to explain them with perfect clearness. Many of her confessors saw with admiration the profound confusion and the extreme humility with which she approached the sacrament of penance. There was, indeed, no subject that moved her more deeply than holy contrition ; she then recommended herself to the prayers of every one, and was perpetually asking pardon for the annoyances she thought she had caused her neighbours.

Our dear Bénigne was not only humble before God, but extremely gentle with creatures ; she endured from certain girls whom we employ for the heaviest work, insults capable of disturbing the sweetest temper, without saying a word about them to any one ; on the contrary, she had a most tender compassion for such weaknesses. When she spoke to secular persons in the parlour, her cordial gentleness appeared in all its lustre ; she was constantly doing kind things for them. I asked her if this did not require an effort. " Oh no," she said, " to whom do we owe more pity than to such creatures ? I consider myself worse than them, seeing that I am always ungrateful towards Infinite Goodness, and I think it is a great gain to oblige these same persons, by our little kindnesses, to ask us to pray for them ; for when I do so at their request, God makes known to me that my prayers are more useful to them."

This is another example of her gentleness and

humble silence. A Sister procuratrix, who had been a great lady in the world, obliged her to change many of her usual practices in the management of the house-keeping; she obeyed her carefully, the more so, she said, "because that good Sister thus rather destroyed my pride." The same Sister gave her a method of preserving certain provisions which was indeed a strange one, yet they kept good by a sort of miracle while they were in the charge of Sister Bénigne, but as soon as she lost the office of dispenser, they were found all spoilt and were obliged to be thrown away. On this occasion much blame was laid on Bénigne, especially as this loss could not be repaired by another purchase, the season being over. The gentle Bénigne was not unaware of this blame, but she did not justify herself, leaving that to the care of Providence; and this was done by an act of humility on the part of the Sister procuratrix, who owned herself the cause of the loss, by having made the provisions be preserved in her own way.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FRUITS OF MODESTY, CONTINENCE, CHASTITY, AND FAITH.



MODESTY, which ought to be the ornament of all the daughters of the Visitation, seemed to be the special virtue of Sister Bénigne. All her actions, her countenance, her words, her tone of voice, breathed this virtue. Her whole appearance

made us say that she was moulded upon our twenty-third Constitution, which enjoins us to exercise ourselves in this virtue, and to feed upon this fruit of the Holy Spirit.

At the age of seventy-seven she held herself as upright and firm as in her youth, except that from time to time she was bent by illness. I once asked her how she could do so with so much illness and weakness, and she answered me, "My Sister, they told me at Annecy, in the first days of my entrance into that holy Monastery, that our blessed Father desired that we should all have the air of princesses through grace and modesty; therefore I have hardly ever failed to attend to this, and perhaps I owe to that, thank God, my not being bent and reduced as it were to a ball, by my violent rheumatism and by the great weights that I have carried. I have, moreover, found the serious and sweet modesty enjoined by our holy rules so necessary to the practice of the presence of God that I have incessantly tried to acquire it." She was certainly never seen to do anything which approached to frivolity, nor to forget the respect which the thought of the Infinite Majesty of God should impress upon us.

The empire of reason and of holy love controlled and ruled all her passions by means of complete mortification; and I will give some details to show how the Holy Spirit was pleased to ornament her soul with the fair fruit of continence. Nature seemed to be rather dead than mortified in her, as if she did

not feel the great contradictions she had to undergo. She denied her senses all the pleasures of life, and kept them in the most complete subjection. "I do not indeed enjoy," she said to me, "even the most innocent satisfaction, for I prefer the satisfaction of God to my own; thus I no longer care for any pleasure, unless I know that it is given me by an act of Thy Providence, O my God, to bring me some little relief. Our Lord has willed that I should often even renounce that of speaking of my interior to persons capable of giving me some consolation, and also that of indulging in the pleasure I take in destroying self, using moderation and self-denial in that as in other things. But the greatest occasion I have had to restrain myself has been in the enjoyment of divine pleasures. Oh! what efforts have I not made to contain myself in those marvellous profusions of graces, which would over and over again have deprived me of life if I had given myself up to them as I wished!"

Her self-denial was continual under every circumstance. She passed whole winters, severe as they are in this country, without ever warming herself all day, and washed all the linen in that cold season; she remained at the mouth of the oven during the extreme heat of summer; and several times passed half-hours plunged in frozen snow, enduring the bitter cold with holy intentions, and supported by the ardour of her love and zeal.

We cannot doubt that so modest and so mortified a person was very pure; but, having already spoken of

this angelic virtue under the head of the vow of chastity, we will here say only a few words on the purity of heart which this virtue produced in her as the fruit of the Holy Ghost. She remarks in her notes that even in the world she felt a mortal aversion to the least semblance of impurity; that nothing had humbled her so much as having once felt herself disposed to entertain love for some creature; that God had never since then permitted her to love anything by her own inclination without regard to dependence on His good pleasure; that her Beloved had once punished her severely for speaking to a religious who well understood her states of grace, because she had not first offered to God the pleasure she felt in it. She also wrote down in her notes all the marks of pure love, of a pure heart, and of an innocent soul, adding, "Holiness consists in the union of all perfections. Alas! in what state are we, my heart, my soul? Let us arise, let us love more purely, let us suffer with more constancy, let us labour with more holy vigour in what God requires of us, to render ourselves more pleasing to His Divine Majesty and His supreme goodness, whence all purity is derived. The continual grace of His presence, which God bestows upon me, has often impressed on my soul the purity of His love. That spirit of love is, if I may dare to say so, a principle of life in me, but of a most pure life. It pierces my understanding with a ray of that purity, with lights and thoughts of peace and love which produce in my will a fire so pure that

I might dare to call it divine, since a Divine Object nourishes it after having enkindled it. It softens my heart by penetrating it, inflames it, consumes by vivifying it, and imprints on this same heart candour, purity, and simplicity ; it renders me industrious and apt in making acts of such pure love as may be capable of touching the Heart of God." In this happy state she united herself with the Soul of the Infant Jesus in honouring God the Father by the virtues of purity and innocence, which flowed into her soul by the grace of the Divine Infant. She received from Him torrents of benediction and holy justification by means of burning transports, ever new, and incomprehensible, she said, to those who had never received them.

Her purity of heart, of action, and of intention appeared in all she did or said and in her every movement ; and though she was so kind and so cordial, she never was familiar or too tender in her manner even towards little children.

Being thus detached from everything earthly, our dear Bénigne freely soared towards God to be enriched with holy faith, that life-giving fruit, the foundation of all the other virtues. I will not speak here of faith regarding the general truths which are the object of our belief, having already done so in describing her three theological virtues. I will rather point out the effects of the confidence with which that faith inspired her, in God, in His Word, and in His promises ; these will show us the truth of what Jesus said to His

friends and disciples, that they would do in His name greater things than He had done.

These are some of the favours which her prayers obtained from Him who has all power in heaven and on earth. She sometimes asked the Sister procuratrix for fruit for the community, as she did myself and at other times in my presence, especially my honoured Sister de Corbeau; we answered her, "O Bénigne, you must work a miracle and provide what is wanting, for it is impossible to send to the market at this hour." "Very well," she answered, "do you unite my little confidence in God to your faith, and we will expect our dessert from the sweet Providence of God." The result was unfailing, and the Sister portress brought her great baskets of grapes and other fruit, according to the season, so fine that it seemed sent rather by the Hands of God than by those of our dear benefactors.

She many times cured our maladies, whether serious or slight, by making a sign of the cross without any one perceiving it. She obtained for several of our sisters a prolongation of life, and for others, their deliverance from temptations and from spiritual troubles and distress. All the sisters of the house were aware of these marvels, and could have borne witness to them.

God also promised her that during the course of her life He would preserve this country from pestilence and famine, and from the dangerous consequences of the siege, as well as from other causes of public afflic-

tion ; and this protection was in reality experienced, although we were often threatened with those scourges ; and the secret favours she obtained for the whole state, and for us in particular, were innumerable.

There is no doubt that if this devout Sister had been in any other place than our little Visitation, where we make profession above all of a hidden life, she would have been more known and renowned ; and, if she would have told all she foresaw, many misfortunes would have been avoided.

From the moment that the interior voice of her Beloved had promised her success in any undertaking, she looked upon the thing as done, and neither made any excuses nor felt the least mistrust about what she was told to do, whatever difficulties she met with.

One night between one and two o'clock, her Guardian Angel wakened her and told her that her Spouse ordered her to leave her rest to go and help a Sister in extreme need ; she instantly obeyed, got up and went down to the kitchen, though she knew not where to find anything, for she had not been employed there for a long time, and besides the kitchen had been newly rebuilt and furnished. " But as I was obeying," she said, " I had no doubt that what I wanted would be given me. Some good broth and biscuits were put before me, I know not how ; I went up to the dormitory, and as I knew neither the name of the Sister nor her cell, I asked the help of my Angel, who then appeared to me, and guided me to the door of the one who was ill ; I found her getting

out of bed in great want of food, and under the pressure of terrible spiritual pains." That Sister had scarcely eaten anything for three days on account of a violent headache; the evening before, feeling a little better, she had gone down to the refectory, but the Sister dispenser forgot to pay attention to her and did not perceive that she went away having scarcely touched her portion; she told me this, and added, "Seeing what God sent me by good Bénigne, I humbled myself, and shedding quiet tears at receiving this help so opportunely, I thanked God and my charitable benefactress for it, wondering how she could have known of my wants. I asked her, but she answered me only by a sweet smile, without breaking the great silence." That dear Sister, who is now, I think, in heaven, assured me several times that she never tasted anything equal to that little feast; that her body received from it admirable nourishment, and her soul holy consolation, with a wonderful spiritual change; that indeed she knew not what would have become of her without the providential charity of that devout Sister, whom she ever after greatly esteemed and cherished, frequently recommending herself to her prayers. She added that she saw at the door of her cell, at the moment Sister Bénigne entered it, a bright light which dispelled all the clouds of her grief, and brought peace to her heart. When our humble and charitable Bénigne found that the good Sister had told me of the little miracle, she blushed and said it was her good Angel who brought that light to the Sister

with many benedictions; adding, that since then she had never forgotten the wants of that Sister, which God made known to her in order that she might redouble her prayers for her.

Her admirable confidence in God obtained for her many other favours of this nature, which it would take too long to relate. The little I have said will suffice to show how lively and efficacious was the faith of our Bénigne.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

PART II.

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE

ON THE INTERIOR STATES OF

SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE.



I MUST begin this second part by a little discourse written by Bénigne herself, in which she shows that love of abasement and union with Jesus Christ, under the form of a servant, were the foundations on which all her other states were built. These are her own words :

“ As soon as I had embraced the perfect life of the daughters of the Visitation, in the rank of lay-sister, my first aim was to consider myself as a servant of our Lord, consecrating, giving up, and sacrificing myself to the Eternal Father, to the end that He might unite me by His grace to His only Son our Lord Jesus Christ, that so I might as far as possible follow Him all my life as my pattern in His adorable and voluntary abasements. O God! how precious is my state of servant made to me by this thought of the Eternal Son of God made a servant !

“ When the Word became Incarnate He appeared,

during His mortal life, only as a man subject and devoted to the orders of His Father; that was His aim, His glory, and all His precious employment, only seeking to honour Him by His profound humiliations. The name of servant was more esteemed by Jesus Christ than that of Saviour, because the former in a special way glorified the Infinite Greatness by an infinite subjection, and rendered an infinite honour to an Infinite Majesty; whereas that of Saviour, which is the Name above every name, tended to His own glory, and was a designation due only to a God made man.

“Thus I may say that my name, my quality, and state consist in being, with Jesus, the submissive and voluntary servant of God. That is the groundwork of all my good; yes, Lord, that is, as it were, Thy first grace in my soul, upon which the others subsist, which has led me in all those abiding-places which Thy love has made me enter and pass through usually every three years. In those various states I have never lost sight of my union with Jesus Christ in His abasement, and I think that if on the one hand His mercy has traced the way for me, on the other His grace has made me walk therein as far as I have done. But, alas! that has been but very imperfectly! The confusion of my negligence never forsakes me, although I am not always allowed to dwell upon it. It is the same with the sublimest favours which I receive in my most exalted states. I may only look at and enter into them when Love commands me, to the end that I may conceive just sentiments of gratitude for

them. I have abandoned myself a million times to follow our Lord Jesus Christ in all His ways. I have received very deep views and impressions of some of His sacred interior dispositions. I have felt within me, if I may dare to say so, as it were a part of His sorrows, and at other times as it were a part of His glory; but I have especially shared in what He suffered in bearing the immense burden of the sins of men, which His love willed to take upon Himself, and of which He was pleased to pay the infinite debt to the Infinite Majesty outraged by them. He constrains me to avow here that He has shown me the favour of appointing me to follow Him in this step of satisfaction for sin, it being His Will that by an effect of the union which He had established between Himself and His little creature, I should satisfy the Supreme Majesty in some little degree for the particular faults of several persons, whose salvation He has willed to commit to me, so to speak, by the prayers which He wishes me to offer for them, and by the great sufferings which He makes me undergo on their account.

“There is nothing by which I can better penetrate the nature of the abasements and the agony of my Jesus in the Garden of Olives, when He found Himself laden with our sorrows before the sovereign holiness of His Father, than the participation which He has given me of that state. That kind of anguish is but incomprehensible, he who has the happiness of aiding his Saviour to satisfy the honour of God for a single sin easily understands what purga-

tory is. I have been often told to speak of it, but I do not believe it is in my power to do so; Jesus alone could explain it: except Him there is no one, not even the highest Seraphim, who has ever been able thoroughly to penetrate what the Incarnate Word suffered to repair the least sin of man; for, the offended Majesty being infinite, the satisfaction must necessarily be infinite; hence it follows, methinks, that only an infinite capacity could express the sufferings which that satisfaction made the God-man undergo.

“All that I can say is that one cannot, without a miracle, bear and sustain the least part of those martyrising sorrows, although on those occasions Jesus makes His creature feel that He keeps it united to Himself by grace and by love. Ah!” she said sometimes with seraphic love, “these pains enter into the marrow of the bones; the spirit feels their effect, the heart languishes, the will is tortured, and one’s whole human nature suffers, and the more sensibly as it is the dart of love which causes that intimate pain, repairing the offence done to an Object worthy of infinite love and solely loved by poor Bénigne.”

She added that of all the states God made her pass through, there is none which more elevates the soul, and transforms it more completely into God, than that of union with Jesus Christ abased and suffering; none which gives it more divine tastes, and inspires it with more love, and more hope of being loved by Love itself; nothing which strengthens the heart more than

those happy participations in the sufferings of the Creator.

"I dare affirm," she says again, "that the soul is thereby, as it were, beatified; love is then at its height, in its holy violence, and in the perfect work of grace; it then transports that soul above the humanity which keeps it prisoner here below, making it enjoy entire liberty, giving it free access to the Sovereign Good. At least I can aver that the soul then no more holds to earth, and no longer considers itself. And if it happened sometimes that what was human in me gave utterance to some cry of pain, and made me breathe little sighs, for comfort in my trouble, Jesus said to me, 'Hast thou not been willing to suffer with me?' Was it not with thine own full consent that thou hast given up and sacrificed thyself to love, and to my Father, to follow me perpetually?' O God! into what transports of love have I been thrown sometimes by that loving representation made by that incomparable Lover! My soul was then seized by an excess of joy; I was ravished when I saw that I was bound and united by adherence and by grace to a God made man by love and by compassion, to live the submissive servant of the Infinite Majesty. No, nothing can describe the excessive sufferings of a heart which follows Jesus Christ suffering, nor the incomparable pleasures which it finds in suffering and in living abased with that sweet Saviour of our souls! Who would not be a servant of God, since God was made a servant? What elevation can equal that of

being made companion of the only Son of the Eternal ? And yet this has been granted to His unworthy creature Bénigne, who often cries out with David, *'I have chosen to be an abject in the house of the Lord.'*”*

Such were the firmly rooted sentiments of this humble maiden. Let us now see the states of elevation of that chosen soul, following the order in which she was introduced into them, though we will first say something of her prayer in general.

CHAPTER I.

PRAYER WITH WHICH GOD FAVOURS HIS HUMBLE SERVANT—
HER DIFFERENT MANNERS OF APPLICATION THERETO.



FORM a separate chapter of the gift of prayer which it pleased God to communicate to our humble Sister Jeanne Bénigne, partly because her different ways of employment in prayer may be of great consolation and profit to souls reading this life ; partly because the graces of her particular states, or interior occupations, which will make up this second part, differed ordinarily from those which she received in that holy exercise, to which she was drawn by actual and nearly always different graces, and not by the permanent ones, such as were those of her interior states. We are to see, then, what was the prayer of

* Ps. lxxxiii. 11.

that beautiful soul, the dispositions which she brought to it, her method in the holy exercise, when she was free to apply herself to it. Here are her notes on this subject :

“In my prayer I know the truth of the divine occupation by the repose which my whole interior enjoys, although the least fault opposing the operation of God in me, causes me little mists which are, however, imperceptible to me. My peace in my prayer is so full, so sweet, so intimate, that I find myself in God without search ; I see myself there without looking ; I know myself without study, and I am lost to myself without ceasing to be His.”

Such are her own expressions : she says in these few words more than could be said in a volume. Her prayer, even to the last days of her life, was always such that her repose in God was as it were consummated by an intimate look of correspondence to that of her Spouse, who allowed her to publish this secret in the terms of the incomparable bride : “*Ego Dilecto meo, et ad me conversio ejus.*”* Let us add that the Well-beloved of her soul, from the time when she commenced this sacred exercise, kept her wholly elevated in Him, and withdrawn in that desirable solitude of soul where God alone speaks to the heart alone, and where it enters into possession of that perfect detachment from everything which the possession of God, who is its All, gives it.

* Cant. vii. 10.

“The disposition which I carry to prayer,” she says in one of her notes, “is a deprivation of every created thing, which is almost a habit with me; it is God alone who has favoured me with this, to Him alone be the glory.

“As soon as that happy hour for conversing with my God approaches, I feel my spirit sweetly drawn; but not always equally, inasmuch as the attraction is sometimes quite gentle, filling the soul with holy pleasures; at other times strong and captivating, when my heart is so laid hold of that I cannot resist it, and that I suffer from not being able to give myself up to it all at once. And if that hour happens to be delayed by obedience or by charity, I bear it peaceably and quietly, as love then gives me a little liberty of action.

“From my earliest beginnings, I accustomed myself to keep to my point of prayer without fail, even if it were only a single word such as these: ‘O my God, I come to Thee. How good is the Lord! my God, my all!’ or some words of our Lord. I went to prayer sometimes with the desire of seeing my misery before the divine mercy, greatly loving to practise this advice of my holy Founder; never to see God without goodness, because we cannot consider ourselves without misery. My Jesus has taught me that those two looks, at what He is and at what we are, are like a balance; as far as one scale falls the other rises. Yes, at the same time that I see my nothingness, I see also the confidence which I must have in a God who loves me, and to whose power I have consecrated myself to carry the

interests of His glory to the highest point possible to me, supporting the operation of His grace, following Him by labours, infirmities, poverty, contempt, forgetfulness and love of my own abjection, by a humble silence ; in a word, by a complete abandonment to His Divine good pleasure, which never abandons poor Bénigne.

“ At other times I have carried to my Jesus my bundle of myrrh, that is, a humble remembrance of my sins ; but in my bitter bitterness I expose myself thus laden and overwhelmed with my misery to the eye of a Spouse who loves me ; I show Him my confidence by my desire that He should make me undergo its just chastisement, and that He should pronounce its sentence with His Divine mouth ; I represent to Him that I am a criminal, and that I offer myself to His august presence as a victim who myself seek my punishment and ask to be sacrificed. O Love ! what pains am I not ready to suffer to satisfy the just wrath of an offended Lover, such as mine ! Sometimes I seem to be already receiving my sentence, and that I shall be satisfied by being made to endure a thousand torments ; I then keep a profound silence before my Judge, waiting for the execution of this sentence ; but love, which devours my heart with the ardent desire of sufferings, then takes full possession of me, making hope succeed to fear. It raises me up in God as His spouse and makes me forget that I had before considered myself His slave. I have felt such ardent impulses to unite myself with God at my ease

in prayer, that I went to it as if carried away by the force of love. I learn in that exercise that God speaks to my soul, at other times He gives. I can relate something of what He says to me by His intimate word; but of what He gives me the secret is impenetrable, because it is Himself who is communicated and His gift is infinite, so that I can say: 'My secret is mine.' Oh, that I could see my heart elevated and enlarged the better to contain it! At other times I asked my Divine Master, with holy familiarity, to mark out for me the way by which I must go to Him; and He then answered me with surprising gentleness, that it was His office to act in me and lead me, and that mine was to give myself up with submission to His Will and to that of my Superiors. He often bids me go to Him with a large and very empty heart capable of receiving much, and having offered Himself wholly to me, He fills it wholly with Himself. O Jesus! O God! How full is that favour!

"Once that gentle Saviour told me that He was suffering in me, and this set me upon a humble and loving search for the cause of that suffering, and when I had tried in vain to divine it, He told me that I had not yet found it. Alas, Lord! I answered Him, hast Thou not engaged to favour me with Thy grace, and promised never to abandon me? Ah! if it be so, dispose of me as Thou wilt, Lord, Thy interest and Thy good pleasure are more dear to me than even the sovereign good of Thy divine possession. I ask Thee only for this one mercy, that my sins may not oppose

Thy love and the accomplishment of Thy designs in me. I will always adore Thy Will, I will love it in time and through eternity. Then that Sovereign King consoled me by this interior expression: 'No, no, Bénigne, that is not the cause of my suffering in thee, it is because thou art too much possessed by the fear which it is wished to insinuate, that I am not the author of thy graces, and so thou dost not derive from them that great profit which I mean for thee and for others. By thy apprehensions I am straitened in thy heart which is so dear to me, and would be far more so if thou wouldest keep it free from those doubts which make thee faint-hearted. Ah, Bénigne, if those graces were only to inspire thee with this great desire for sufferings, this love so eager for the fulfilment of my will, this ardour so vehement to arrive at my divine union, would they not work enough in thee to be accounted true graces?' "

"Alas!" she said again in her memoirs, "it is in my prayer that I know I am opposing the torrent of God's mercies, when I refuse them and put back his liberal Hand, so prodigal in my regard, for the only motive that I do not merit them; and I learn that the only means to make sure of my eternal salvation is to abandon myself absolutely to the operations of grace, and to do in all things the sweet Will of my Saviour, who is all love for His ungrateful Bénigne, without thinking of myself in any other way except to see that the same love has made me entirely His.

"When the hour of prayer approaches I dispose my-

self thereto, and all at once I am emptied of myself and all inflamed with a burning ardour to possess God: entering on that holy exercise, I enter as if into possession of Him, but in such wise that I seem to be no longer in this mortal life, but to have attained to the bliss of heaven, if I may venture to say so, in order to make known to all how far the goodness of God goes; at least, I can affirm that, all unworthy as I am, I have often felt in those happy hours of prayer, very merciful and very great fulness of God.

“I also often go to prayer uniting myself to the divine dispositions of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially to His spirit of adoration, when He went into places apart there to pray to His Eternal Father. My manner of application to His Passion is simple, intimate, and purely spiritual. I contemplate with the same look the Divinity and the Humanity; by the one I penetrate into the other, finding at the same time my heart filled with love for the Father and the Son; and by the respect and gratitude which I conceive for Both, I am set on fire with love at the sight of the Infinite Love who is their ineffable union. Peace nearly always superabounds in my soul during this exercise, and I may say that God and the perfection of His being are the usual subject of my meditation. The beauty of that Divine Being excites in me so great a sentiment of love, that I am all in flames. That love has often perfected my faith, raised up my hope; and these three virtues have impressed in my soul infinite knowledge, by admirable views of the Divine Attributes.

“Sometimes, also, I feel perfect joy that my God is loved and praised by the faithful, but this is much increased when by an effect of His mercy, He Himself gives me to understand that He is served to His liking by so many holy souls who live in the world, and by the multitude of my dear and good sisters of the Visitation : oh ! that joy then becomes excessive and leads me to hope that I shall one day be of the number of those hearts faithful to God and destined to glorify Him for all eternity. At other times pain succeeds to my sweetest pleasures when I see by a contrary effect that this great God is not served, adored, and loved as He deserves : this idea makes my pain mortal and so overwhelming, that I should succumb if the Hand of God did not sustain me. I am at times transported and ravished by an inexpressible consolation in knowing that my God is alone able to know and love Himself. I desire to be able to love Him myself as much as He ought to be loved, but the impossibility of doing so oppresses my soul.

“How many times in my prayers have I been raised above my own being and lost in the abyss of God who destroyed all that I am in order to absorb and transform me into Himself by grace and love. I have suffered martyrdom at the sight of the wrong which even just souls do themselves by not advancing as far in perfection as would be in their power, and by not obliging God to multiply His graces upon them by their correspondence to them.

“I have frequently passed all the time of my prayer

in renewing my immolation to the Divine justice, and this I never do but under the pressure of an ardent desire to glorify God. Sometimes that very offering makes me tremble as I consider and penetrate what are the chastisements due to sin, but I am at once consoled when Truth teaches me that everything which is done by love will be rewarded with love and by Love itself.

“ In this holy exercise I have often found that I bind myself and am bound to God, present without my seeing Him, but not without believing Him and feeling the fulness of His grace, which strengthens me on some occasions, and on others melts me like wax exposed to the heat of a great fire; by this means I feel that I am melting away in God, who then occupies me with the view of His Will and designs upon me, teaching me what I ought to ask, and giving me the assurance of being heard. He shows me all these mercies with a grace which charms me, which makes me give my soul to this same grace that it may be filled with it anew; and what remains to me of the certitude which He gives me of His love is, that the soul sees clearly that when it is satisfied with God, and takes pleasure in Him by an intimate confidence, it receives a kind of authority of love over Him.

“ I am also occupied with my misery and nothingness; and I have been taught that purity is the perfection of the soul. Sometimes I am reduced to the ordinary way of making acts, and can do nothing but pray God to take from me that which displeases Him, that

which is opposed to His glory, and to give me such dispositions and virtues as the increase of His love, the continuance of His grace, His assistance, His guidance, and such like."

We find, also, in her writings: "Remember, my heart, the comparison our Lord has given me on the state of my soul in prayer. It must be like a sponge which may be dipped in milk, in wine, and in blood; thus the heart of Bénigne is often imbued with the lovely milk of the Divine sweetness by an operation all of love; at other times it will be filled with the force of a powerful attraction which will give it the holy vigour of the sacred wine which cheers the heart of man and makes pure souls bud forth; lastly, it will be all steeped in the Blood of Jesus Christ, which will produce the miraculous effects of the Divine mercy, capable of raising it out of its deep misery. In a word," she said, "the graces received in my prayer require that I should die to my own thoughts, and to everything which may disturb the operations of grace.

"I must say, too, that once I was to blame for not remembering to gather the spiritual nosegay at the end of my prayer, according to the instruction of our holy Father to Philothea; whereupon my Spouse Jesus comforted me perfectly by the assurance that He Himself was that fair nosegay, since he was called the lily of the valley and the flower of the field, adding, '*I am the flower, here are thy fruits: complete abandonment to my good pleasure and to my providential care; resignation*

of thy will to live submissively under my guidance and that of obedience; desire to suffer, even to martyrdom, if I were to bid thee; lastly, care to do everything from pure love, and for my glory alone.' "

On issuing from this exercise, she felt obliged to take time to come to herself; for God kept her still occupied, although differently; if she had had enjoyment during prayer, suffering came afterwards; and if she had suffered, enjoyment followed. She was also obliged to go into dark places to recover herself, because the mere sight of the sky, or of the elements, was enough to take her again out of herself, and set her so powerfully upon God that she could not withdraw without suffering a kind of martyrdom and holy languor.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST INTERIOR STATE OF SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE—OCCUPATION IN GOD OF ALL HER POWERS, DRAWN BY THE GENTLENESS, AND AFTERWARDS BY THE FORCE, OF DIVINE LOVE.



OME, Divine Love, I entreat Thee, and open Thyself the fair heart of Thy chaste lover, Jeanne Bénigne, and make me see the interior beauty which she hid there, and the sacred gifts which Thou hadst so mysteriously set there, that I may manifest them for Thy glory. Thy all-powerful finger must guide my hand, otherwise it will be too weak for so hard an undertaking.

The first particular state of this chosen soul was an

intimate occupation and seizure of all her powers, effected by the attraction of a divine and all-pure sweetness: it commenced from the moment of her consecration to this love, which was that of her entrance into the house of the King her Spouse. From that time grace filled her with its divine unction, and love so engaged her with the charm of its attraction, that, blind to any other object, she saw nothing but God alone in everything, the Creator in every creature; without, however, having need of the latter to mount up to Him. At that time this loving soul did not walk: she was carried as a sweet child of love, or as a young bride leaning on and supported by her Divine Spouse, even before she had learnt to say to Him, with the bride of Scripture, "*Læva ejus sub capite meo, et dextera illius amplexabitur me.*"*

She confessed to me innocently that there are hardly any favours and holy familiarities, which she afterwards heard had been granted to certain privileged souls, which she did not receive at this time of her introduction into the cabinet of the King of kings.

She was there in possession of her Sovereign Love, and in the enjoyment of His divine presence, lovingly following that sweet attraction as the precious odour of the perfumes of the Heavenly Spouse, by which she was excited to run in His footsteps, by an entire surrender of herself to the good pleasure of His Divine Heart.

"He might from that time," said she, "dispose

* Cant. ii. 6.

entirely of me without its ever occurring to me to inquire into His adorable designs, nor to make the least reflection about myself, nor about anything which might concern me ; and without my interior or exterior look resting for a single instant elsewhere than in God, my only object, my only love. I admired the riches of my God, which could all at once so perfectly enrich a soul. They were distributed profusely to mine from the first instant that I gave myself to Him ; and I understood with an inconceivable pleasure, by a pure sight of His infinite perfections, that He was in very truth the Lover chosen among a thousand. And oh ! what love may be compared to His, which steals into the heart in a moment to beatify it by the possession of Him : all other love appeared to me unworthy, insipid, and contemptible.”

But suddenly the gentleness of that attraction was changed into force, and instead of following the charms of grace, Bénigne was drawn by a merciful violence so that her spirit and her will were as if carried away by an all-powerful Hand, which laid hold of all she was, to possess her solely, to unite her to a Sovereign Good, and to subject her to a power without limits. This is what she says of it :

“Alas ! there was no more speaking to me of breasts nor of milk ; I was suspended in God : the sight of the Divinity alone sustained my being. I was, as it were, absorbed in the sovereign perfection of infinite Greatness and Truth, whose beauty and goodness was made known to me with an evidence so

luminous, so divine and supernatural, that I could hardly persuade myself that I could arrive at happiness more perfect and of greater extent than that which was given me."

This great God, however, made Bénigne see that He is no less infinite in love than in power, for He always found new tendernesses to show her, so that she often only counted the hours of day and night by the number and diversity of the favours and mercies which she received from the liberal Hand of her Divine Lover, always all love for her, so that her life might be called a perpetual rapture.

"The marvellous thing is," she said, speaking of this, "that I was so drawn and raised out of myself that my soul felt as if detached from the body, which suffered strange torments by this kind of separation; and my suffering, of which I was very sensible, was so great that it was a miracle that I could continue to live, enduring so frequently this sort of death; but the same love sustained the poor languishing body, while it raised my soul so high and so powerfully that it found God, and was indissolubly united to Him. Thus I might say that one part of my being enjoyed an almost infinite good, while the other suffered mortal convulsions."

Her heart in this state was like a happy captive, which only acted and answered to that mighty love in conformity with the emotions which it received from it, without heeding to do anything itself but let itself be drawn, carried, and lifted up by a perfect adherence

to the designs of this love. She passed whole hours, especially at night, quite motionless, and before she could return to her outward functions she was obliged to call out and to walk, like a person transported and stirred by a strong passion ; and that she might not be heard she would retire into the cellars, her usual place of refuge. A state thus elevated, thus separating and uniting, never made her fail, any more than the rest, in any of her domestic duties. On the contrary, she felt that she was carried to them by the impetuosity of the same Spirit who transported, at the command of God, the good prophet Habbacuc* to the lion's den, to take to Daniel the help which God sent him, that he might not die of hunger. In like manner this maiden was often conducted by Angels into her kitchen, there to give out food to the spouses of Jesus Christ.

I often asked her if, when she found herself in the sweet and strong violence of this state of love, she had never said to God, as so many Saints have done, and even our holy Father Francis of Sales, "*Satis*, enough, my God." "Oh no!" she said ; "the strength which God gives me on these occasions is so powerful and so extraordinary that I faint not under the effort of the divine operation." I think then, I may add, that the Sacred Spouse, for the accomplishment of His gracious designs on this soul, had used the same precaution which the Holy Spirit tells us He had formed out in regard of the Divine Bride, building strong

* Daniel xiv. 32.

walls to stay her, and strengthening them with cedar* wood ; or rather, that He had made her a wall herself, and that her bosom was fortified, as He describes, to receive the force of His darts, and find her peace in these combats of love.

CHAPTER III.

SECOND INTERIOR STATE OF PURE SUFFERING BY THE ASSAULTS
AND ENDURANCE OF ALL KINDS OF PAINS AND TEMPTA-
TIONS.

AFTER this spouse had enjoyed so many sweet favours from her Spouse, and received so many proofs of His love, she was invited to draw from bitterness as much, and even more, merit than she had derived from the Divine consolations.

The Well-beloved of her soul wished to assure Himself, as it were, of the fidelity of His loving one, and therefore He commanded the north winds to blow in that fair heart as in a garden, to call forth from it the sweet odour of the fruits of the virtues which He had planted there. He was at once obeyed, and our dear Bénigne was placed under the press of the Cross to endure there a thousand torments, even till she thought herself nothing but an object of God's avenging justice, which she felt all the more for having up to this time been the object of His love. She saw herself destined to undergo the effect of His divine rigour

* Cant. viii. 8.

after having contemplated Him in His illuminations. That heart, formerly penetrated and possessed by a love so sweet, was now as it were deserted by the Divine Lover. Her body was all at once overwhelmed with a thousand natural and supernatural ills. Her soul was reduced to a mortal sadness by the apprehension that this sensible separation from her Well-beloved was caused by her own fault. The least shortcoming made her tremble with horror; she no longer found that gentle Hand which guided her so happily, and of which she had experienced the powerful and tender support; she no longer knew on what to lean, although she was attacked by all kinds of temptations, even the most material. Everything had abandoned her, as it seemed to her, since she saw herself deserted by her God, who was her All; she was even afflicted by the sight and sound of evil spirits, who were then permitted to exercise and torment her, though not to disturb her peace.

Still more, her soul felt the revolt of all her passions, which up to that time had appeared so submissive, and controlled not only by reason but by divine love. Now they only appeared rebels, who endured with difficulty this holy domination; they rose up incessantly, and were only held down by the strength of a faith which subsisted in the obscurity of a black and dark night. It seemed to this poor spouse that her Love had no more to do with her, and to complete the bitterness, the fear of her faithlessness overwhelmed her, especially the fear of failing in love. This pain

increased every hour, so that the dear soul felt constantly that she was dying of anguish caused by love alone; and this moved her companions to pity one who might well be said to be discoloured by the burning rays of the Sun of justice. "Alas!" she said at such times, "I think that everything in me is opposing my God and the operations of His grace!" And afterwards, when she spoke of this time, she said: "I was always looking for the cause of my pain without being able to find it; when I examined myself most closely, I seemed to find fewer shortcomings at that time than at any other, and this made me lament my blindness and weep bitterly. But my Spouse appeared unmoved by my sighs and tears, so that I really believed myself to be an object of reprobation; and then, falling from one abyss to another, I cried out, O God! what torment to be a subject of hatred to a Lover, to a Love so lovely as was my Lord Jesus, who had testified to me that He loved me! Ah! poor Bénigne, it is because thou didst not correspond to that infinite love, which nevertheless I will always adore. Yea, my God, I will love Thee through everything!"

It must not be thought that even one of these acts so perfect and so generous which were produced by this afflicted heart, and formed by this soul all black with grief, but all beautiful with the fidelity of an inviolable love for her absent Love, was rewarded by even a single shadow of consolation. Whatever she did, with whatever subject she fed her thoughts,

to whatever reading or conference she betook herself, all served to increase her desolation. Every recourse, even to the Holy Virgin, her good Mother, and the Saints, appeared to be useless.

Since the consideration of a great past happiness increases present pain, it may be imagined what must have been that of Bénigne at finding her Lover in nothing, after having seen Him in everything, and after having been lovingly obliged as it were, by a holy force, never to lose for a moment His divine presence, nor the sentiment of the most intimate and close union which it is possible to have with the Supreme Majesty.

“I asked,” she said, “the whole earth for news of my Well-beloved. I wished to see Him in all His works; but, alas! what an obscure view was that! The means which I tried for consolation made me still more desolate. It seemed to me that, as I had been deaf to the voice of my Spouse, nothing had any pity for me; that all had been bidden to hide from me the place of His sojourn; that my want of correspondence hindered me from seeing the Friend of my heart, which yet continued through all these tempests to go to Him as to its haven, wishing for no other than Him. I was no longer bound to the only Object of my love, but by an entire and absolute conformity to His adorable Will; and although I had not courage in my abundance to tell Him that I had enough of His favours, I ventured then to ask Him for an increase of pain, provided that by that means I

might succeed in testifying to Him my love and my desire to glorify Him."

No one understood her, and although she thought she saw in her soul so many disorders and sins, she found nothing of which to accuse herself, except some failings which might be called faults of the just, but which she regarded as enormities; and seeing that she was sent away without absolution, she imagined that the confessor had been ordered to refuse her even that blessing, which is granted to the greatest malefactors when penitent.

Even the pity of her Sisters in some sort ceased, and God allowed that some of them should make much of the least faults which they saw her commit, saying, This is the end of the great graces they talk of her receiving. "Alas!" she said to me, "this filled up the measure of my sorrow; it was nothing that I was deprived of the favours of my God, but when I regarded myself as the cause of their being despised and accounted useless, I was indeed pierced with a mortal dart."

She went in her utter desolation to the places where she had received the most graces from her dear Spouse, and conjured Him to return to her; but she was not always allowed even to call to remembrance the divine sweetness which she had once tasted, when that could give her consolation.

"It seems to me, however," she said, "that even at that time everything in me yielded to God; at least I loved Him exclusively, and if I could have

believed that He was convinced of my love, all the rest would have seemed bearable to me. I know well that, all severe as He seemed, I only sought Him in everything, for I was never less taken up with creatures than at that time."

She left off none of her austerities, and this is the more remarkable as she was also deprived of the pleasure which she took in mortifying self. "But," said she, "as I had not the pleasure of enjoying God, I was very glad to feel no other pleasure." Retreat, silence, and mortification occupied her entirely, and she tried by these means to prove to her Spouse every moment her fidelity and her love.

God having brought this dear soul to the point of perfection which He wished all these pains to produce, came to her one morning while she was serving their portions to the Sisters of the first table, and invested her with all the grace which the presence of the Supreme Majesty brings to a soul. "He dealt with me as God," she says in her memoirs, "and bade me go and show myself to the priest; then, as He hid Himself again, I was again in darkness. I left all and went, without even taking off my apron, to the sacristy, where I found a Sister who was leaving Monsignor Théophile Chivron, Archbishop of Tarentaise. I entered the little parlour, and detaining him, I said, as if beside myself, 'Monsignor, you will hear me, if you please;' and he gave me leave to explain myself at length. I spoke nearly two hours consecutively; I told him all my pains, and all the blessings

which God had poured so abundantly into my soul. He told me that I was right to lament for the least infidelity, seeing the obligations I was under to so prodigal a benefactor."

This prelate, learned in doctrine and eminent in perfection, declared to our honoured Mother that the graces which this maiden had received and was receiving were admirable. And this we shall see better by the testimony he gave, which will be found at the end of this work.

Our dear Bénigne derived very great benefit from this conference, and when she had thus reviewed in memory her past years in the great bitterness of her heart, and with sentiments of loving contrition, she remained some days in a state of sweet and heavenly peace, keeping herself before God like a blank canvas, completely stripped of every view and movement of her own, till the time of her annual retreat, in which she was favoured with a vision of our holy Founders, as has been related in the First Part, and then passed into that interior state which will be the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

THIRD INTERIOR STATE—GOD INSTRUCTS HER AS A MASTER, HOLDING HER IN HIS DIVINE HAND TO FORM HER AT HIS WILL.



AFTER three years of the severe trials which we have just seen, this chaste and faithful spouse at length merited to hear again the gentle voice of the Well-beloved of her soul, telling her that the winter and the hoar-frosts were passed, *Jam hiems transiit*, and that He was in very truth the God who exalts the soul, who enlightens the eyes, who gives health, life, and benediction. This true Lover did all this for His poor Bénigne, for in the return of His presence and the charm of His conversation she easily forgot all her past pains. He raised her soul to a new and more intimate communication of grace and union, filling it with divine riches, illuminating her spirit and becoming Himself her Master in a new state.

This is how she herself speaks of it in her memoirs. “My Spouse restoring to me His presence put me into a most sublime state. I saw myself as if in the powerful Hand of God who was fashioning me, methinks, at His Will. He became Himself my Guide, leading me by a delicious, but narrow way, Love allowing no imperfection in me; I was unceasingly instructed in the Will of my God, His designs upon me, and the means I had to use to please Him better. I would not for all the world have left His guidance for a single moment. I let myself be turned at His will,

being then very pliable under the operations of grace ; so much so that if obedience had bidden me lead a life quite extraordinary, I should have obeyed, not only without the least difficulty, but even without the least reflection ; and if I had not myself carefully avoided all singularity, I should have been every moment beside myself, and ravished in Him who occupied my whole soul." With all the care that Bénigne took to hide her graces, she could not help their being seen by the Sisters, especially through a certain lustre which surrounded her ; her face was beautified by a heavenly expression which made it plain that her heart was filled with her God.

They now began to regard her with admiration, and determined to arrive at a more perfect knowledge of the effects of grace in this soul, by making her speak for that purpose to Father J. B. Baratta, of the Society of Jesus, a skilful and enlightened director. After he had examined her carefully, he formed the favourable opinion of her which will be found at the end of this Life.

The peculiarity of her state at that time was a participation in the life and perfection of love, by the teaching of her Divine Master, and by the operation of His Hand upon her. By these means God kept her united to Himself, and there necessarily resulted from this union a greater separation from herself and her own being. She only regarded herself now as a thing entirely belonging to God, devoted to His good pleasure and holy disposal.

From that time her graces began to be graces of pure and spiritual impression, without any material figure, or imagination.

It was now that, by her introduction into the school of the Sovereign Master, she became as if incapable of understanding anything else, at the reading, sermons, and conferences, but what might contribute to her greater perfection ; she was besides always attentive to the admirable lessons of her Love. This docile disciple could not forget any of them, and she declared to me that if she had written them all down, there would be enough to form a large volume.

“ These three years,” she said, “ passed more quickly than did the others, so complete was my pleasure in being thus occupied with these sacred lessons, from which the ear of my heart was never turned away. I found these beautiful instructions as sweet as they were efficacious, experiencing at every instant admirable changes of grace.” On this subject she never dared to explain herself fully, and we must be satisfied with giving here only a small part of the marvellous lessons which her Love gave her, in addition to those which we have already related in the First Part, Chapters VIII. and IX.

“ Bénigne must not live according to her natural inclinations, but follow in all things the leadings of grace which give her such pressing desires of contempt, of pain, of the abandonment and loss of herself in God.”

“ I learn,” she says, “ that next to my vows, nothing

is more perfect than total abandonment, upon which indeed my vows are grounded; the complete liberty which the soul thus gives to love of acting in her, being the satisfying of love (as Love Himself told me), which requires of me fidelity, obedience, and especially humility, humility.

“My Master wills that His disciple Bénigne should accomplish and should love in all things His Will, without any desire of her own, without choice of gifts, of blessings, of graces, or of anything else. He wills that she should reserve nothing for herself, but attend solely to doing everything in the single view of pleasing Him and exalting His glory, even by the smallest thoughts, the least actions, and the shortest words.

“Great lessons were given me about purity of intention. I was taught that the soul that gives heed to this gains much in a short time, as I have said elsewhere; but here I add that my Master taught me that by this purity of intention the soul sees accomplished in her the words of the apostle,* ‘*He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him;*’ and that it thus receives a blessed capacity of willing all that God wills, or rather a kind of impossibility of willing, desiring or loving anything but what God wills that it should desire, or will, or love, or do.”

She was also taught the dignity of this divine possession in the soul, and the manner of its opera-

* 1 Cor. vi. 17.

tion therein. It was this which enabled her to walk in this state with a respect almost divine, feeling and enjoying that possession of grace, and finding herself in the Hands of the Infinite Majesty in an incomprehensible way. She bore its operations with an intimate veneration; and rays of evident holiness issued from her interior over her person.

One day, during Office, as she was going (in presence of the whole community) towards the Superior to ask her permission for an extraordinary discipline, as a distraction from her intimate occupation, according to the command given her in this case, her Angel said to her, while she was making the genuflection, "Sister, your Spouse says to you through me that it is difficult for the King to dwell in a place without its being known, and without his splendour appearing;" and suddenly she was in an ecstasy. Nothing was said or done to her, and she took no notice of anything. At the time of Mass she recovered from her ecstasy and took her usual place, without, however, losing the interior sentiment which continued to occupy her.

"My Master," she said, "always followed me with His sweetness, to teach me, as if He had only me to guide; and I had only to listen always to Him, as by His grace I tried to do. I understood more especially at this time by the lessons of my Love, the merit of that pure charity whose only aim in all that it does is to render itself agreeable to God, not that it may appear perfect itself, but that it may increase His glory, forgetting its own interest to uphold His,

and its neighbour's, and also because it thus pleases pure love."

At the end of the third year of this state she fell dangerously ill, and was cured (as we have seen in the First Part) by the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, having been ravished to heaven to contemplate her triumph and glory.

CHAPTER V.

FOURTH INTERIOR STATE—JESUS CONDUCTS HER AS HER GUIDE—THEIR MUTUAL INTIMACY—SHE IS FAVOURED WITH A SECOND ANGEL GUARDIAN—SHE SEES THEM BOTH, AND IS RAISED BY THEM TO THE THRONE OF HER SPOUSE—SHE SLEEPS ON THE GROUND FOR THREE YEARS.

SO many graces caused in the soul of the humble Sister Jeanne Bénigne a great confusion, which arrested her one day in her reflections on her scanty merits and her infidelities. She complained thereof to our Lord, who by this severe reproach gave her to understand that this recurring to herself was not pleasing to Him: "Thou wilt always be complaining; and because I distinguish thee with such marvellous favours, thou wouldst be without faults; now I am going to punish thee severely. Choose thou one of these three punishments:—

" 1. Either to take no more pleasure in anything which thou doest, or which is done to thee.

" 2. Or, to undergo great bodily ills.

“3. Or, for others no longer to find the pleasantness which they have hitherto found in thee.”

Sister Bénigne at once chose the first and the last, feeling a great repugnance to the second. In this she acted against her usual way of letting God choose all which concerned her, and of this her Spouse complained still more! “*What! may I not then yet dispose of this thankless one as I will?*”

“Alas!” she says, “at these words my poor heart was seized with a mortal pain, and I knew that I had deserted my duty in not letting my Spouse do what He would in me without my interference. He told me expressly that I should never be without bodily sufferings. I submitted to this, begging His pardon for my fault, promising and vowing to my Love a blind submission and an inviolable fidelity. At that instant the God who wounds and who heals, who kills and who makes alive, came and inundated me with a torrent of graces, and said, ‘Thou shalt suffer the three chastisements.’ But I had no cause to complain of that sentence, for I was, in other respects, filled with blessings in the new state into which my Spouse made me pass, and in which He became my faithful Guide. I followed Him with extreme pleasure, treating with Him with the confidence and familiarity of intimate friends, and receiving from Him incomprehensible marks of the most tender and delicate love, inasmuch as my soul could in no way distinguish whether God lowered Himself to it, or whether the divine power raised it up to Him.

“Ah! what happiness for a soul to see that the Most High Majesty deigns to treat with His creature as equal with equal! These are graces wholly divine, and of incomparable power! Yes, I venture to say God appeared to forget what He is and what I am, loading me with His favours, obliging me to go to Him with a perfect confidence, and to regard Him not only as a lover, all love, but as a lover all mine and passionately desirous for my soul. It is only to that adorable Friend that this name belongs; it is He alone who knows how to win and charm the heart, because it is He alone who can and will satisfy it. There were days and times when this Divine Love gave to His poor Bénigne, in this state, graces so singular that He forced me to say that He dealt with me as a magnificent King, and as a Spouse whom love made mine; He was pleased to make Himself, as it were, dependent on my desires and my will, with favours which would have cast me into an abyss of confusion if the same Love had not wholly occupied me by tendernesses unheard of and unknown in human love. I desired to abase myself to glorify Him, and to find out new inventions in acknowledgment of His great mercies shown in my regard; mercies truly infinite, and which raised my soul to a height of grace and love which I could not have borne if Love Himself had not lent me His aid by making Himself, as it were, a myself in me.

“No, I do not believe that mortal lovers can make use of any expressions which are not insipid, coarse,

and unfit to manifest their passions; it is only my Jesus, that chosen one among all the children of men, who, being the sovereign and essential Love, knows how to use terms infinitely expressive to testify what His love is to the heart which He gratifies and favours by union with Him. On my part I made Him all the return possible to me, trying to give Him every mark of perfect love, leaving all to please Him, sacrificing and abandoning myself to His good pleasure, and faithfully offering Him everything in my power. In a word, there are no kinds nor degrees of love through which He did not make me pass and rise, leading me Himself, since He had become, as I have said, my faithful guide.

“It was at the commencement of the three years of this state that my Spouse appointed me a second Angel Guardian, who, as well as the first, followed me everywhere day and night. I was always between those two personages of the Court of my King, and I had the happiness of seeing them unceasingly at my side. Their beauty was ravishing, and I do not think my imagination had anything to do with that grace. No; the sight of them was above all understanding, and the senses could not attain to it. Their garments and their appearance were like pure light, of a splendour which that of the stars does not equal. I was taught by those two angelical Spirits; I was also comforted by them, corrected, stirred up, warned, even served by them, and honoured by their conversation in a quite familiar way, so that I might take the liberty of

saying that my soul was bound and united to them by the bonds of a mutual friendship. I make use of this expression that I may be understood ; at least I can affirm in simple truth that, after that of my Well-beloved, I never enjoyed companionship more delightful, and which caused me purer and more sensible pleasure among all creatures, than that which existed between those celestial Spirits and the unworthy Bénigne of Jesus. Alas ! I was then as a stranger among our Sisters, and I avoided and fled from their presence and conversation with all imaginable care, as much as the Rule and obedience permitted.

“Those pure Spirits were severe in correcting me for my faults. Once, I know not in what way, they raised me before the throne of our Lord Jesus Christ (and this again appeared to me a true vision). I saw His Divine and Infinite Majesty surrounded with all the instruments of His Passion ; the beauty of the Cross especially was presented to me in a marvellous light. I discerned the adorable Wounds of this Divine Saviour so beautiful, so brilliant, that there is no precious stone which can represent to us their brightness ; the majesty and the grace of His countenance ravished me, and I could the better distinguish His beautiful features in that He covered Himself with a luminous shadow, as if to let me enjoy more at my ease the divine sight of Him. I was in a complete suspension of my senses, in rapture, drawn and elevated out of myself ; in this fulness of celestial sweetness I saw one of my Angels respectfully approach the sacred throne, and I

knew that he said to the Sovereign Judge, 'I bring Thee, Lord, this child, who is not getting the better of her faults, who will still interfere with her own guidance, and will not give herself up entirely to the desire of others in that which concerns her change of rank. We admonish her very often, but see not the change which Thy Majesty desires ; it is for Thee, her great Saviour, to punish her.' They then made known all my faults with a clearness and exactness so great and complete that, methinks, it is only those blessed Spirits who can make our examens with entire attention to each point, their penetrating sight having a power of searching the bottom of the soul, even to its slightest imperfections. On their accusation I knew myself better than I had ever done, for there remained no fold, no recess, in my heart which was not exposed and brought to light before the eye of my Jesus, who appeared all love for me, although He showed Himself as Judge. I felt that this same love which He testified to His criminal Bénigne supported me, so that while I still remained in the humble consciousness of my misery, I had no fear of it, to daunt my heart ; and after this sweet ecstasy had lasted some hours, I saw the ineffable light which surrounded both the Judge and His throne again increase and brighten. I saw, too, the Eternal Monarch strike, as if with His Hand, and say to the Angel : 'I swear by myself that if Bénigne does not perform what you tell her with stricter fidelity, I will punish her by letting her fall into greater and more humiliating faults than those

of which you have accused her.' A threat like that which the Divine Spouse made to the bride of the Canticles, saying to her,* 'If thou know not thyself my retreat, O fairest among women, I will send thee to feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds.'

"My faithful Guardians urged me to rise many times in the night to praise the holy Name of the Lord, and to bless Him with David in the midst of darkness : but, O God ! who can tell the fervent impulses by which I was urged to obey these blessed Sentinels of the King of peace. I rose from my bed without a moment's hesitation, whatever might be the season ; I prostrated myself before His Divine Greatness, adoring Him from the bottom of my soul, and I prayed to Him for the whole earth. After this practice had lasted a considerable time, one of my three chamber companions perceived it, for I could not avoid making a little noise in getting out of bed ; she teased me so much about it, that in the end I was forbidden to rise ; but Love, who willed to be thus served by His unworthy creature, bade me act in another way by which, without any noise or stir, I might satisfy His desires, as well as the ardent wish He gave me to suffer for Him. It was His Will that I should sleep on the floor, and that the bare earth should be my bed for three years. I lay down there just as if it had been my usual bed, keeping myself always in the same position, enjoying inexplicable pleasures in this little self-denial." Thus

* Cant. i. 7

this faithful lover might say, as well as she in Scripture, that this was that bed, narrow but strewn with flowers, into which the Spouse only may enter: she tasted there many more delights than the voluptuous in their couches of feathers and down.

The three years being ended, her Spouse bade her one night to rise from that bed so delicious to her love, and to return to her usual couch, humbling her by these words: "*Up, my child, take thy rest again, I have another who serves me as much as thee.*" She obeyed without the least delay most submissively, without making any difficulty about the pain which she might experience in returning to her ease, after having so long deprived herself of it, and with so much love. But when she returned to her former rest she found her Spouse there also, and He told her that the soul which served Him as she did, and adored Him many times in the night, was Sister Marie Villani, a religious of the great order of St. Dominic at Naples. Our Sister Jeanne Bénigne formed a holy bond of charity with this soul, favoured like herself by the Divine Spouse. We must, however, remark that she had never had any idea of the name or state of this great servant of God; whose life was sent to us afterwards, with the condition that it should be read in the refectory. No sooner had our humble Sister heard the name of this venerable and illustrious spouse of Jesus than she was transported with a holy joy, receiving thereby an additional assurance of the truth of her own graces. She asked a Sister to read this

life to her in private, especially the chapters which most related to the graces with which she herself was similarly favoured. She often found there that beautiful golden cord, of which we have spoken in the First Part, and which she had not seen for a long time. At last her holy guide, the adorable Jesus, seeing that she had arrived where He had designed to lead her by the state of the ineffable familiarities of His magnificent love, made her pass into that fifth State, which we are now about to see.

CHAPTER VI.

FIFTH INTERIOR STATE—OF LANGUOR AND EXCESS IN WHICH SHE WAS PLACED, AFTER HAVING BEEN WOUNDED BY THE DART OF DIVINE LOVE.

HAVING during the night ordered her to return to her bed, her Love, who had formed a new design on His lover, repeated the command in the morning and said, "*My beloved go and repose.*" He then drew her as if out of herself, and shot at her a dart of love which wounded the interior of her heart so deeply and painfully, that she assured me she was for three hours as one dead, with no other consciousness than a delicate and simple emotion of love. "This," she said, "might tell my Divine Archer that I was satisfied with the wound He had just made in me, and declare to Him that I deemed that mortal stroke an infinite good. The slight motion of life

which remained in my inmost heart made me enjoy an inexpressible pleasure in the effort of my dying languor."

In this state she was found leaning on her bed by some of her Sisters, who, seeing her so pale and exhausted, set about giving her aid; but one of them suspected the cause of suffering so desirable by the heavenly expression of her countenance, and persuaded the others to leave her to repose. Thus she was not awakened till she herself willed. The bell which rang for the community Mass recalled her to her senses, as it generally happened that when a common exercise was rung for, it awoke her from her raptures that she might not break the Rule. During the holy Sacrifice she felt permitted to complain to her Spouse, *Vulnerasti cor meum**, Thou hast wounded my heart. These words, flowing gently into the Heart of her Well-beloved, called forth therefrom a renewal of grace in her soul, and put her again into her rapture, which all the Community perceived.

This dart of love made her so susceptible to its most delicate motions, that everything inflamed her. Its ardours were so fervent that being unable to bear the sacred and loving operations, she generally remained as if in a swoon and in continual languors, the sight of which moved us to a joyful compassion. She then began earnestly to desire death, in order to be wholly united to her Sovereign Love, often crying out

* Cant. iv. 9.

in retired places, "Oh! who will deliver me from this mortal prison?"

She has often told me that since that happy day she felt God in her soul in a wonderful way, being as if all filled with Him, so that she thought herself quite incapable of making others understand or of understanding herself the worth of this favour. These sacred swoons and outflowings of her soul united still more her own being to God and God to her, by an infinite mercy, and sunk her imperceptibly in a state which she called, and rightly so, an excess of love; for the excess by its vehemence causes a languor which, feeding an exquisite sentiment of loving sweetness, produces afresh the excess of complacency, of benevolence, or other such feelings towards the Object beloved.

The soul of our Sister Bénigne, after this divine wound, remained separated from anything not purely spiritual, to such an extent that she had no more pleasure in destroying self, as before, by her great penances, which had been one of the faults of which her Angels had accused her before the throne of God. "No," she said, "nothing reaches the point struck by the arrow of love which my Lover aimed at me."

This dear soul has often assured me that the graces and favours which she received in these three years were so varied, and succeeded one another with so many different characteristics, that it has never been possible to her to speak or write of them as she would, nor in an intelligible manner.

At times the great God, who makes Himself every-

thing to the heart which He loves, and who takes in its regard all kinds of names and qualities, presented Himself to Bénigne at one time as Father, at another as Pastor, Friend, Brother, Lover, and Spouse, imparting to her with a magnificent love favours appropriate to all those names, putting no bounds to His divine and liberal prodigality. But it was especially when He came to her as God, that the excesses were the greatest. "It was indeed then," she said, "that I needed that His Hand should be my support, to be able to bear the height and the weight of so great and adorable a Majesty."

A single truth of the Faith sufficed at that time to draw Sister Bénigne as if out of herself; a word of holy Scripture, the sight of an image, turning her mind to God. One of His names, one of His attributes, brought her into excesses which at times were sweet and gentle, at other times powerful and ardent. Those words of the royal Prophet, *Pars mea Deus*, read, or accidentally heard, inflamed and transported her, as well as those of Abraham: *The Lord alone will enrich me*; and many others.

In one of these excesses it was given her to understand that it is not all the glory and all the blessings which we shall enjoy in Paradise, which will form the rich recompense of the little we shall have done in this world for the pure love of God, but rather the possession of this great God, who will give Himself to whomsoever shall have left anything for Him. "Yes, yes," exclaimed this fair soul, "God Himself

will be my happiness, my glory, and my great reward !”

Sure of this thought, she often entered on a foretaste of this glorifying and perfect possession of her Sovereign Good, and went out of herself by a love of complacency which partook of the infinite, considering its Object, crying out, “ Oh ! how good is the Lord !” She declared that this grace was incomparable ; that it had taught her what her happiness in Heaven would be ; and that by this same favour she received, even in this world, that merciful hundred-fold which the Son of God promises in the Gospel.

This devout Sister would have wished to have a thousand lives, a thousand bodies, a thousand hearts, a thousand worlds, to give them, to sacrifice and offer them to her God, so great, so magnificent towards her and towards all who love Him.

These excesses illuminate and instruct the soul in an admirable way, because God Himself, when He causes them, presents a divine truth, or rather presents Himself, who is the Sovereign Truth, and in an instant gives the soul to understand this, making it comprehend mysteries and secrets of love which, were it to speak for years, it could not explain ; and this understanding is never again effaced, at least not entirely, if the soul continues faithful.

It was in these three years that our Lord gave her the understanding of the literal and mystical sense of the holy words of Scripture which she heard read or sung (it must be observed that she had never, in her life,

read Latin, and did not understand a word of it). She was chiefly penetrated by the sentiments contained in the Psalms. God imparted to her lights and knowledge of mysterious meanings in three or four words, and even in a single one of these words of life.

I should go beyond all reasonable limits if I were to repeat all the passages which especially touched her; I will only cite the most remarkable.

She learnt and understood much concerning the *Miserere*, *Beati immaculati in vîd*, *Domine probasti me*, *Eripe me Domine*, *Inclina Domine aurem tuam*, the two *In te Domine speravi*, nearly all those in our office, the seven Penitential Psalms, and those which are sung at our general communions. Some verses of the two *Confitemini*; these single verses of one of these: *Dextera Domini fecit virtutem, dextera Domini exaltavit me; dextera Domini fecit virtutem; non moriar, sed vivam et narrabo opera Domini*, caused her to pass long hours in these loving raptures.

The passage of Psalm 141: *Considerabam ad dexteram et videbam: et non erat, qui cognosceret me*, caused her excesses of compassion, of grief, and of tenderness, because of the complete desertion in which creatures often leave the Creator. She thought, too, that Jesus Christ Himself addressed these words to her, to console her by the slight resemblance which there was between Him and her on this subject; for our Bénigne at that time was experiencing many contradictions from creatures.

She thus passed from a sentiment of extreme love

to one of extreme sorrow. The great difference between the emotions which the soul underwent helped to cause this excess.

And by this diversity of sentiments, none of which lasted long enough to become a habit, her ardour, instead of being slackened, was even quickened and renewed by the novelty of the favours.

Once when she was passing before the chamber of our Mother de Lucinge, her heart wrung with grief for the trial of her graces to which she was put, she prayed God to withdraw it from her, saying, "Alas! must the enormity of my faults make doubtful the truth of the divine favours in my regard, after I have so often been certified thereof in this place?" At the same moment Jesus Christ showed Himself to her in a brilliant light, and God the Word thus spoke within her: *Ne timeas filia, ego doceo te*; and this caused her a great excess of joy and love, during which she enjoyed for a long time pleasures the most ineffable and divine.

Another day, after having passed the whole morning in an excess of sadness and confusion from the excessive fears suggested to her, in order the more to try the truth of the interior words she heard, being at recreation, while she was saying the mid-day *Angelus*, as she pronounced the sacred words: *et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*, she was suddenly ravished in an excess of love and divine assurance of the presence and habitation of God in us, and particularly in herself, and it was said to her: "If I

dwell and am present in thee, why may I not speak there? secret conversation with the soul is certainly permitted to me, because I am the Word by whom all all things were made." She remained motionless and her face appeared the colour of a rose. I remember now the place where she received this mercy from God, for I was placed near her: this grace was also known to all the Community.

I think, moreover, I can say that this fair soul was at this time enriched, by that essential Love who is at once gift and giver, with His sacred seven-fold gifts, and that she was indeed one of those of whom our dear holy Father Francis of Sales speaks, in his *Théotime*, who having arrived at the summit of the ladder of perfection of divine love by the seven steps of His sacred gifts, finds at the end God leaning towards her, ready to give to her heart the sweet kiss which the Spouse of the Canticles asked for; and that it was there in a perfect union that Bénigne by divine contemplation imbibed strength and sweetness.

In a word, it is not possible entirely to understand all the graces which this soul received by means of her excesses: "O God! Sister," she said to me, "who can express the rich gifts of this magnificent Giver? who can tell the taste of His graces! when I wish to say much of them, I think I say less!"

When I surprised her at the moment of any of her excesses she spoke rapturously of them: then she seemed like a person carried away from herself, confessing that there is a certain superabundance of graces

which savours of immensity: that these graces had often carried her away into the ocean of the Divinity, and deprived her of her own life, in order to impart to her one wholly of grace and love. She thought that the dykes which obedience had ordered her to oppose to these torrents of the divine goodness had been the sole hindrance to her actual death. "Yes," she says in her memoirs, "I know that in reward for this obedience my natural life was prolonged by Him who has the key of it, and that I did not lose the least of these infinite bounties of God in consequence of having deprived myself as I had been told to do of lingering over the enjoyment of these graces. Oh! yes, I may say, in spite of all the contradictions and trials I underwent, God has treated my soul according to His good pleasure, and He has done so especially at the time of this state of holy excesses." This state, which, I think, may be called a compound and extract of all the others, is admirable and wholly gratuitous. Nature, I think, can have no part in it, because the soul never goes into it of itself, and never makes any effort to bring it on. It lives in continual abnegation, being guided from light to darkness, from the bosom of night into that of the sun, from a sea of bitterness into an ocean of infinite sweetness, from extreme enjoyment to entire privation, from the most humiliating poverty to the possession of immense riches, and this without the soul contributing thereto anything of its own, except by its abandonment to the guidance of an all-powerful

love, to such an extent that it may be said that the soul in this state is under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit, to whom Jesus has, as it were, handed over our sanctification. It is, indeed, by these sacred impulses alone that the soul of Sister Jeanne Bénigne was enlightened, inflamed, and transported, in these excesses, without her calling them forth by any deed of her own, for she was always seized and laid hold of by that Divine Spirit as if by surprise and when she least foresaw His arrival and His powerful operation.

CHAPTER VII.

SIXTH INTERIOR STATE—OF AMOROUS LANGUOR—A GRACE WHICH SHE RECEIVES FROM THE MOST HOLY TRINITY—HER SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE WITH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.



AFTER the Divine Spouse had kept this faithful love three years in these marvellous excesses, He made her pass to a state of amorous languor and to a complete abandonment of herself to the most holy operations of His grace, with which He favoured her at this time in an admirable way, as we are now to see. One Sunday, during her morning meditation, the Three august Persons of the Most Holy Trinity raised to Themselves the soul of Sister Bénigne by an intimate knowledge of their perfections; and made her, by a simple look of pure and lively faith, as it were penetrate the profound mystery of their ineffable union : a grace so great that she called

it the marvellous one. By it she understood that these words were spoken to her in the secret of her heart:—by the Father : “My daughter, I receive thee;” by the Son : “My spouse, I give myself to Thee;” by the Divine Spirit : “Dear soul, I inflame thee with my love.” These words produced their effect in her soul at the same time, by a kind of globe radiant and all on fire which was placed in the middle of her bosom, where she afterwards felt a devouring heat, which produced in her an impression of admirable purity of body, of heart, of spirit, love, and intention.

She found herself at the end of this prayer so filled with God and with a love so communicative of its own perfections, that she was constrained to go into a little court apart to recover herself a little, finding herself carried out of her senses ; but she was more than ever engrossed in that high occupation, and in this place there passed between God and her soul something so divine, so sublime, so extraordinary, that, she said, “I have never been able myself to understand it, much less to explain it. I saw myself at first encompassed as if by a cloud which, although very bright and of an admirable splendour, appeared covered with certain darknesses filled with majesty. I knew that the most august Trinity then showed itself to the eye of my understanding, as far as was possible. But, O God ! who can express this ? It is a deep place holily obscure in its ineffable splendour, which dazzles the sight even of the Seraphim. At the same time, an adorable voice issued from this cloud

and said to me, showing me a very high mountain, 'here is the place which I wish you to reach.' I then understood that my consent was required to enter on the way which would lead me to that exalted place ; I gave it without hesitation, feeling strongly disposed not to offer any resistance to this sublime grace which was given to me. After the act of my perfect self-surrender, I knew, by a divine light, that the Word was explaining to me that this voice was that of the Father, and that I had, in order to obey Him, to go up to the summit of that mountain, where I should find the perfection of divine love. The Only Son of the Most High comforted me, reassured my weakness and my fear, and put me into the right road, which seemed to me as barren as it was rough and difficult : He informed me, moreover, that I should have Him for my companion and guide. The Spirit of love inspired me with courage and ardour, so that I knew by operations differing in their impulses and in the effect of their graces, but united in their ends, that the Father was drawing me, that the Son was sustaining me, that the Holy Spirit was lifting me up and carrying me to that mountain inaccessible to all, except true lovers."

"I was still more strengthened at holy Mass, at which I was as if carried away by a transport of love ; just before the Communion, I heard again that divine voice saying to me : '*I have placed my treasure in thee, keep it sedulously ;*' and I received a vigour quite supernatural, to enable me to bear so many graces

heaped up one upon the other, and all of so great price."

On the evening of that day she found herself overcome by an amorous languor (which formed her state during these three years), in which, however, she was sensible of such powerful support, that she could be sure it came to her from on high ; and she found even in this second wound, which love had given her by means of the globe of fire, a kind of quickening vigour, whereas the first had been followed by an almost mortal swoon.

Once on feeling the divine ardour of this sacred globe in her bosom, she cried out, " Ah ! Lord, is not this one of those sensible graces which I am counselled not to dwell upon ? " " No," answered the Divine Word, " thou wilt know it by its effects. I think it good to act thus, my gifts must appear sometimes, and make themselves felt by all thy being ; this is even necessary."

And it would truly have been most difficult for her to carry that sacred fire in her breast through such a number of years, without being sensible of the supernatural ardour which was devouring her ; indeed, her body which up to this time had been robust, so wasted away afterwards that it became a mere skeleton.

The extraordinary graces which we have just described were more than sufficient, as she herself has told me, to occupy her those three full years, and to keep her in a sweet languor of love, a languor so much the greater as with the most vehement desire of showing a perfect reciprocity to the infinite love of so

great a God, she found it impossible to give vent to this as much as she would have wished. Her dear Spouse seeing her so pressed by the desire of being wholly His, willed to conclude His marriage with her. Here are the very terms of that happy spouse copied by me from her memoirs :—

“ On the morning of the feast of St. Gregory the Great, as I was kneading the bread of the community (it is in the time of my most sacred languor) I felt an extraordinary hunger for the Holy Communion, which was a general one this day, a Tuesday in Lent. I made our aids bestir themselves, that all might be ready for the Community Mass. I am sure that our Lord helped to satisfy me, and that our work was half done by the ministry of His Angels, for all was so soon finished that our sisters had still time to go and change their veils; as for me, when I had recommended the little bread which remained in the oven to the holy Angel Guardians, and closed the bakehouse, I went straight to the choir without making any other preparation, quite transported by my ardent desire for perfect union with God in the Sacrament which is the bond of perfection of pure love. At the door of the choir this desire became stronger, and on entering therein I saw it, by a sight wholly spiritual, filled with a light from which there issued a most majestic brightness. When I had thrown myself at once on my knees I perceived close to me the incomparable Mary, Mother of my Lord Jesus Christ. In my transport I said to her: Oh! make

me agreeable to thy Divine Son. She was near me, her unworthy servant, all through the Mass. At the moment of the consecration, she clothed me as with a white robe, wonderfully beautiful, so rich and so rare that none is seen like it on earth. She girded me afterwards many times round with a chain of plain gold, and said: 'Thy great care, Bénigne, must be henceforth to enrich this chain with precious stones;' teaching me in what manner I should do so. I kept near that Divine Mother in a wonderful repose, being sensible partly of an infinite sweetness, and partly of a need so extraordinary of union with God by this communion that I could wait no longer; a moment appeared an age to me. My love seemed to foretell by that extreme ardour the happiness which was going to befall me. I was even incapable of occupying myself with the blessing which I already possessed, of having so near to me the sweet Mother of my Jesus, who herself conducted me to the holy table, the nuptial feast so greatly longed for. When I arrived at the window where we communicate she presented me to her adorable Son; immediately I saw beside me the glorious Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, summoned by that Spouse Himself to be witnesses of the sacred marriage which He was going to contract with His unworthy slave; and at the moment when I received the Bread of life I knew (and by what rare knowledge, O God! I cannot express it) that our Lord Jesus Christ was uniting Himself to my soul, and that He was uniting me to Him, as a sacred Spouse to a

bride made all His own by grace; and He spoke to me these words of salvation, of life, and of sweet mercy: 'Thou enterest to-day, and at this very moment, into the participation of my infinite treasures by an effect of one of the greatest and rarest graces which I have shown up to this time to my dearest servants.' The Princes of the Apostles congratulated me on my happiness, and I saw the choir filled with blessed Spirits; some of them followed me the rest of the day, which I passed wholly absorbed in the majesty of God. I understood some things at this happy time which I could not possibly commit to writing; although all this was brought about in a purely spiritual way, without any participation of the senses, and still less of the imagination, I distinctly discerned all the objects offered to my sight in an admirable order, and without once turning aside from my simple and single looking at my Divine Spouse. It must be confessed that this favour was equally marvellous and incomprehensible.

"I had to make a great sacrifice when it was necessary to leave the ravishing occupation which the love of my Spouse gave me, to go to my ordinary bustle of buttery and kitchen, but nothing could distract me. I was unceasingly at the side of my Spouse; His grace kept me in a profound admiration of the sweetness of the words which He had pronounced to the ear of my heart at the moment of our union, 'Thou enterest to-day into the participation of my infinite treasures.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVENTH INTERIOR STATE—OF CHASTE DELIGHTS FROM THE
CONTINUAL PRESENCE OF THE SACRED HUMANITY OF OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST.

AS I might fear that the greatness of the graces I am describing, which were given to this humble maiden, would not meet with the full credence which I must justly desire for the glory *of the charm of divine love*, I venture to beg those who shall cast an eye on these pages to follow the advice of one of the greatest mystics of our time :* “Bring faith to our readings, that you may adore and admire the great love which Jesus Christ shows in still continuing, in a certain way, the miracle of His Incarnation, by making Himself visible to souls which He finds disposed to receive such graces.” This is what this sweet Saviour did in regard to her whose life I am writing, and it is not hard to believe that He willed to favour His dear spouse with His presence in a special manner after He had united Himself so closely to her. She could then, indeed, justly call Him her true Spouse, because Himself, Essential Truth, said to her: “I have espoused thee in faith, and Bénigne will know that I am the Lord who have united her to myself in justice and in mercy.”

A new effect of this mercy was the special grace with which He favoured His dear Bénigne, by giving

* L'Abbé Ollier. Letter 154, in 1672.

her for three years the enjoyment of the sacred sight of His adorable Humanity, by a presence so intimate, so perfect, and so clear to the interior eye of her soul, that she could not speak about that state without a holy transport of love and admiration for the Infinite Goodness. This is what she herself said of it to me:—

“By favour of a light more brilliant than the day, I saw at my side this sweet and holy Object, like a young Monarch; and I was allowed to distinguish, as if in a magnificent sun, features of the rarest beauty which can be imagined, surpassing all that can be seen of beauty upon the earth. Grace and majesty shone equally and in entire perfection in that divine face. Sometimes He walked side by side with His humble creature; sometimes He went before me, leading me as my light. He was my Teacher of justice to instruct me; my friend to console me; my torch to give me light. He charmed me by His ravishing sweetness, and frequently I was raised out of myself, and as if lost in the immensity of His marvellous attractions, so that I could not have been distracted an instant from the sight of Him, which kept me in very great attention to do all that I ought in so adorable and holy a presence. It impressed me with a most profound respect, which, nevertheless, did not make my loving sweetness less sweet or less perfect.

“In my other states I was at times united to God by the force of an all-powerful love; but in this I followed freely the same love with an attachment

quite voluntary, very sweet, and always bent upon pleasing a loving God."

Everything was done in her and by her by an attraction of grace which was delicately impressed in her, gently communicated and intimately shed into her soul by the Author of that grace. He made Himself so sensibly felt in her spirit and in her heart, that she said: "Yes, He became man for my love; I say for my love, because I could not then consider Him, the great God, but as a God all love, and love all mine, in my character of spouse: any other application was taken from me. If I happened to commit some faults, by the goodness of my King He did not hide Himself, He did not withdraw Himself from me, not even for the least interval: His love covered my defects the better to discover to me His ineffable beauties. At other times He took the trouble to correct me by a single word, but so lovingly that my peace was not disturbed thereby; I hardly felt confused at it before He raised me again by some new mark of His love; and the whole ended by a quiet act of self-abasement.

"Thus the exercise of our love (so she ventured to call it) was never interrupted; on the contrary, it was often increased and made more active by one of the enchanting looks of Jesus, my Spouse. O God! well might I then, all unworthy as I am, say that I abounded in delights. How sweet and powerful are His looks, and fit to inspire the only true love! How efficacious is their force to raise the soul from its dunghill and its misery, to make it rise from the

desert of this world to the bosom of the Divinity, in the arms of His love itself !”

I once fancied to ask her if she did not discern the colour of the garments of her Spouse Jesus. She answered me with a smile, “O Sister, they are garments which have nought to do with our colours here below ; there is a luminous brightness encompassing Him, in comparison of which the sun which enlightens the world is dark ; the senses cannot attain to it, and the sight of it is purely and simply presented to the soul.”

It was in the midst of the sweetness of this state that she was made to suffer much by the disapproval of her secret vows. One of her confessors told her that only an Angel could really reach their perfection ; that they were rather an idea of what a creature consecrated to God would wish to be able to do and practice for Him, than a thing possible to our weakness. But Jesus continued pressing her often to tighten the bonds which united them, by renewing the holy obligations which she had put herself under through love. He would not let her attend to the troubles which those different opinions might cause her, saying to her, by His interior word, “Bénigne, my spouse, all thy blessings come from me ; they are thine, and they make thee mine to fill up the measure of true blessing ; and thou wouldest outrage me by even thinking anything contrary to this merciful truth. My love fills and enriches thee, as the grace of my presence directs and leads thee.”

She told me, moreover, that in her prayer at those times she was introduced by Jesus Christ Himself into the abyss of the Divinity, whereby she felt herself all imbued with certain heavenly sweetnesses which cannot be described by human tongue. "All ideas which can be given of such graces," said she, "are low, coarse, and imperfect; for there is no expression which can give an idea of what it is to feel oneself united to God."

Our Bénigne herself, I think, did not attain, as indeed she avows, to the understanding of all the holy pleasures which her soul enjoyed in the height of her faith and her love. But what I can more certainly affirm is that she tried to carry that love for a God so liberal in her regard to the very highest point which can possibly be imagined; and we saw that dear soul making miraculous progress in all virtues. She would not have been willing to lose an occasion of showing her fidelity to her Spouse, and this made her careful not to utter a word except either for charity or from real necessity.

It was about this time that, as she did not make known to our Mother de Lucinge certain lights which she had had for the good of the house, her Spouse punished her for it by permitting that a new Superior, although very virtuous, did not like her way of acting, and dismissed her from her little domestic domain, adding that the house could get on well enough without her miracles. This conduct was somewhat felt by her because she had the service of the Sisters much at

heart, and it had been given and committed to her by our venerable Foundress. But she profited by this little rebuff, taking it with her usual virtue; and she derived from it so much unction of grace, that she would have wished to be able to make it known to all those who suffer from creatures, persuaded that she would thereby have convinced those souls of the care which God Himself takes to comfort them.

The humble Bénigne at the end of this state had yet other consolations; and we cannot but say, that if on her side she might be called a true daughter of St. Francis of Sales and of the Visitation, diffusing the sweet odour of Jesus Christ, the Divine Spouse for His part often introduced her during her prayer into His secret cabinet, that she might the more enjoy His sweet company. It was there that she was truly at home with Him and could protest to Him that she found His cheeks like a vessel of perfume, and His lips like the purple which distils precious myrrh. This is her explanation of it: "I was at that time in my prayer like a poor shepherdess whom a great king had married and taken to his court. I often considered the misery from which I had issued, as well as the lowness of my origin, and then I left myself entirely to the care of an invisible hand by which I was led into the presence of my King. He was shown to me by a most pure sight of Him, and I beheld Him seated on a throne of infinite beauty, richness, and majesty. This Great Sovereign left me there sometimes like a slave, un-

worthy of His looks and of His approach. He made me understand what I was in myself, and that insight caused me confusion, but so sweet and loving, that I was well aware it was love that gave it me out of love. At other times I was treated more severely, and made to take note of my unworthiness, by the indifference with which my King regarded me, making as though He knew me not. But at other times, I was hardly introduced into that magnificent hall before, discerning nothing but my Spouse, I found myself before Him, and at once placed like a queen at His side, and that without any prevision or preparation of imagination. I was so closely drawn to God and united to Him by love, that whether I were treated as a slave, or whether I were regarded as a spouse, I felt myself all in God, so that I could then truly say with a holy and loving assurance: I have found Him whom my heart loves, I hold Him, and I will not let Him go."

In this admirable union with the Divine Spouse, Sister Bénigne knew in an admirable manner in the Heart of Jesus, that God will not have a daughter of the Visitation attached to her own interests. He will have them gentle, charitable, and above all perfectly united among themselves. "O God," said she, "a word of disunion among us would be a monster, and Love would not leave it without severe punishment." "Yes, Sister," she said to me several times, "I see that God will have these dear spouses of His little well-beloved Visitation, always united to Him and to their Sisters. He wills them to be at all times

devout, humble, gentle and charitable." "Ah!" she added, "what graces will they draw upon themselves, what blessings on the body of the Congregation, what glory to God and to our holy Founders, if they are faithful in accomplishing this desire of their Spouse. They must know, the good sisters, that they are very dear to His Divine Heart and that they are destined to live and glorify Him much; but they have to learn to live according to this same Heart, humble and gentle; that is the whole lesson which the love of that adorable Heart is incessantly giving me, and He wills me to make it known.

CHAPTER IX.

EIGHTH INTERIOR STATE, BY WHICH SHE ENTERS INTO PARTICIPATION OF THE GOODS OF HER SPOUSE, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

HAVING considered Bénigne introduced into the cabinet of Jesus as a well-beloved spouse, we are going to see her in the present state in possession of His treasures, by the participation in the graces of our most holy mysteries, and in the life of love of that same Love.

Let us see in her own writings how this took place. "On my issuing from the state of my great delights, my Spouse took a new possession of my heart and came to me laden with a thousand new graces; the first was that He said again to me, by His interior

word: 'Bénigne enters into the participation of all the infinite blessings which I can communicate to the souls of my elect.' From that instant He caused me to enter into a state of that merciful participation, and I received such a profusion of graces that their multitude and immensity seemed to make me forget all which up to that moment had been given me by the liberality of my God. I felt that I was participating in the graces of all the holiest mysteries; that in each one, the merit of the Divine Spouse was applied to me, and that I was thereby made as it were one thing with Him by our union of pure love. I understood that these words of mercy were gently instilled into my heart. 'Bénigne, the grace of Jesus, His love, His goods are thine, and I am myself a spouse all thine, my glory and my eternity are for thee, and I will be everything to thee.' "

This was the groundwork of that state which occupied her three years; but these graces were renewed to her many times by distinguished favours. Here are some features of this:—

Once on hearing read the Gospel of the Prodigal Son, she was penetrated with the sight of her own poverty, and said to our Lord in her confusion: "It is I who am this waster of Thy goods." She was answered with an infinite love; "If thou hast nothing thou art mistress of all, and possessest all in possessing me; take from me what thou wilt for thyself, and for whom thou wilt."

"One Ascension Day," we read in her memoirs, "I

saw this glorious Saviour in His majesty, adorned with His wounds, which were beautiful, and shone extremely, and I was allowed to cast myself as if in a passion of love at His feet to kiss them. It was then that I was filled and as it were drowned in a sea of graces and of participation in the merits of those sacred Wounds, and of the Blood shed from them."

She often was aware that our Lord, who is all love, in His love was shedding His grace in her ; that His grace was as if infused into her. Once, seeing the Holy Child Jesus in the arms of His sweet Mother, who offered Him to her, she dared not at first receive him, and wished to draw back out of respect, but the adorable Infant complained of it, saying, " What ! I run to thee, and thou retirest, doubt not it is I, I am thy salvation and thy light, it is I who have espoused thee in faith ; yes, it is I thy Spouse, who marry thee to-day in constancy of love.

One of these profusions of mercy sufficed to occupy her day and night during whole months : she hardly slept at all, but she enjoyed that mystical and supernatural repose of the holy spouse, in which her heart watched to love her Spouse.

One day when she was troubled because she no longer felt those anxieties which she once had to see the time of prayer arrive and the time of night, in which she might better enjoy the Well-beloved of her soul, the interior voice relieved her from this trouble, saying : " My daughter, water flows without ceasing, gently and naturally in large rivers, but it

makes a great noise in the torrents, which, swollen by other waters, sometimes by their rapidity inundate the neighbouring lands, and sometimes are left dry themselves. In like manner, my daughter, those overflowings of mercy which caused thee anxieties, ideas, and excesses, did not make thee enjoy me more fully than at present, when my grace itself passes and flows peaceably into thy soul, like the great rivers which never dry up. Remember besides, that if the gentleness of my sweet communications is thy good portion to vivify thee, my sufferings also are salutary to sanctify and enrich thee with merits: I give my graces, I impart my gifts, I offer, I take everything, according to my good pleasure, in the souls which are mine and to whom I give myself, because my true lovers have my goods in common.

One Good-Friday this spouse of Jesus crucified received a great abundance of the grace which the death of our Lord has gained for us. "So that," said she, "instead of being like our Sisters, withdrawn into my nothingness at the sight of a God suffering for my love and in reparation for my sins, it seemed to me that I was plunged in the precious Blood of my Spouse, as in a boiling liquor in which I burned with love with an ineffable pleasure. O God! what a grace was that! it would be difficult to me to describe it. All that I can say of it is that I knew that whereas I had been up to that time espoused to that suffering and blessed Lover in faith and in constancy, I was at that happy moment melted and transformed in Him by the union

of love. It was when I heard those sad words of the Passion sung, *Et emisit spiritum*, that I received in me that Spirit as a bride's present, and a divine participation in the dispositions of that very Spirit."

All the rest of that day and the following she was occupied with the admirable sweetness of the three sacred and different kisses, which she had received at different times : of grace, of mercy, and of love, corresponding to the three kinds of spiritual marriages : of faith, of constancy, and of union to very Love. She received this one from Jesus dying, leaning His head upon her participating and communicating to her His spirit at the same time that He yielded it to His Father.

On Easter Day she was profoundly humiliated at the sight of her misery : she was also sensible of some fear that painful sufferings might befall her soul in the last moments of her life, but her Divine Love, who willed not that the joy of this beautiful day should be impaired in His beloved Bénigne, calmed her troubles with these words, " Fear nothing, dear soul ; my Holy Mother shall assist thee in thy extreme sufferings in life and in death : she shall be near thy bed as she was at the foot of my Cross. The Spouse will also give to His beloved, in her last moments, that mark of a participation in all His possessions, and the Mother of the Bridegroom shall be the Mother of the Bride." On Easter Monday she had again abundant participation of graces, similar to those which Jesus risen communicated to the disciples at Emmaus. She was ordered by her Spouse to become a true pilgrim

never to abide elsewhere than in God, who willed to be by love, what He was already by essence, her *Alpha* and *Omega*.

The whole religious life of Sister Jeanne Bénigne was a continual participation in the graces of her God; but those which she received in the state which we are describing, were more abundant, more extraordinary, more interior, and all divine. She received by them sublime knowledge and secret impressions of our most holy mysteries, of which she spoke learnedly, clearly, and lovingly. She was often at this time so transported with love that she would press the hand or the arm of the Sisters, as if to say to them, "Let us love God." "But," said she, "I spoke not, because I soon perceived what I was doing and what I was about to say." These sweet transports made me so strong, that if I had not checked myself in that impetuosity of the spirit of love, I could easily have lifted up a Sister from the ground, and would have cried out in my transport, "Ah! Sister, how great is God's love! Let us give Him the return He deserves."

She could not always in the vivacity of her sentiments of zeal and love so completely contain herself as not to inform some what God willed of them, as several have assured me.

But to return to our subject. One Wednesday in Holy Week, after Communion, she was lifted up above her own intelligence, and she saw her heart become, as it were, a fair white cloth, on which Jesus Christ imprinted Himself, and in which He wrapped Himself. "I

felt in myself," she says in her memoirs, "a vital warmth and a supernatural ardour which frightened me. I had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, who said to me: 'Fear not, my daughter; this is a great favour; thou now receivest in thyself my Son living, as I received Him dead at His descent from the Cross, and thou servest Him for a winding-sheet, instead of the winding-sheet in which He was wrapped, to receive the marks of His Passion. That thou mayest correspond, my daughter, to this impression and participation of grace now granted thee, be supple and flexible, like a piece of fine linen, to the divine impulses.'"

I will relate, in the very words of the happy Bénigne, another of her graces of participation which, I think, is the most marvellous of all.

"One Sunday after the Epiphany, as I was at morning meditation, which I had commenced some time before the others, and was considering how God is offended in the world by the false liberties of the carnival, I entered into a most extraordinary excess of spirit, reflecting on the wrong which sin does to the Infinite Majesty of God, and upon that which man does to himself by mortal sin; a wrong which is nothing less than division and separation from his sovereign Good, if he be not restored to charity by penance and loving repentance. On this subject it was said to me: 'It will never be known what I have suffered to repair the evil of man, but thou wilt comprehend some little of it by the grace which I am about to give thee of participating in my sufferings.'

I gave myself up to receive it fully, being excited thereto by a strong love; I abandoned myself wholly to God, and at once I was shown in a single instant, by a very lively intellectual representation, all the pains of Jesus, especially those which He suffered in the Garden of Olives; and I was informed at the same time that my body, as well as my heart, was as it were a blank tablet, on which I saw imprinted a sketch of the pains of my King Jesus by an impression of love, but it was a love and grace so painful that, without the aid of that same love, it would have been intolerable to the strength of all mankind together.

“A Seraph would, I think, have difficulty in explaining what I felt of love and grace in that painful dart; it penetrated all parts of my body, my whole heart, my spirit, and my soul; all my powers were sensible of it, and that gentle grace flowed even into the marrow of my bones. I received it in all its force and in its entire fulness. O God! how sweet to me was that ocean of bitterness! how I loved that rich share in the pains of my Spouse! It was so abundant that the smallest artery of my body had its part in it, and I doubt not that love worked a miracle to keep me in life on that occasion. An interior voice said to me: ‘My daughter, bear henceforth in thyself a participation in the sufferings of Jesus, and judge by what thou wilt suffer what my Son has suffered to give me the glory of which man robbed me by his sin.’ Alas! I confessed then, as I do now,

that it is a thing that cannot possibly be known. No, no; I say boldly, it will never be known, not even in heaven, what torments my Jesus has endured.

"The violence of this excess lasted three whole hours, and left me for three days as if in a state of death. The painful impression of it always remained. In the first days I kept myself apart as much as possible, not being able to drink, nor eat, nor rest, so excessive were my painful love and my amorous pain. I went into dark places, stretching my arms and drawing out all my joints as if to enlarge my heart, to the end that that suffering impression might be more spread, and that there might be nothing in me unmarked by it. I tried to lose nothing of those immense and sacred treasures of the pains of my Jesus, who took pleasure in engraving them, so to speak, at every moment and little by little, now in one part of my body, now in another. My soul also had its share in the pains of the Heart of Jesus; but I must add that if my sufferings were great and continual, there was indeed also imparted to me from on high great and powerful succour, in order that I might endure them bravely. When I received this grace I felt neither fear nor doubt; I gave myself up to it entirely, and I understood by a light of love that the Love, in giving it to me, had acted out of absolute power. My desire for crosses and torments then increased instead of being satisfied, my thirst for sufferings being no less ardent than my love for t

Spouse of my heart, who I saw had suffered infinite pains for an ungrateful spouse such as I am.

“ I would have been willing to go to the end of the world, cross the seas, climb the highest mountains, pass through the most frightful deserts, to invite all creatures to love God and be converted to Him. I would have accounted myself happy in doing all that to gain a single soul to God, as I understood by this grace how dear they are to this sweet Saviour in general and individually. This zeal devoured me each moment. I cherished it, knowing that all these mercies were given to me for no other end than to make me contribute by my prayers and by my sufferings to the conversion of sinners. With what pleasure would I not have gone through the streets crying aloud: ‘ O man ! whoever thou art, how canst thou have the audacity and the arrogance to offend thy great God ! Ah ! human and reasonable creatures, how far do you carry the excess of your ingratitude in outraging, as much as lies in your power, your good Creator and loving Saviour, who died to redeem you from eternal death, and to communicate and give to you a life of grace and love as well as glory immortal ! ’ ” I might relate other instances of these merciful participations which Sister Jeanne Bénigne received, but the one I have just related suffices, in my opinion, for all.

I will conclude this chapter by assuring my readers that this happy soul narrated this grace to me with such great transports of love, and such great ardour, that all insensible as I am to the graces of my God, I

could not continue listening to her, and I was obliged to beg her to make some pauses in her discourse, so deeply was I touched and penetrated thereby.

CHAPTER X.

NINTH INTERIOR STATE—OF INTERIOR OCCUPATION UPON THE
INCARNATION OF THE WORD—INSIGHTS INTO THIS MYSTERY.

THE Divine Spouse willed to give back to this dear spouse very sweet pleasures, to comfort her for the sufferings of which we have just spoken. Sister Jeanne Bénigne thus saw accomplished in herself the wishes which the sacred lover formed, of finding her brother sucking the breasts of her mother to enjoy Him at will, that no one might again venture to despise her. Happy desire, which has been fulfilled only by the Incarnation of the Word, who has given Himself to us for a brother sucking milk from the bosom of Mary; a mystery which has taken away the reproach of our nature, by raising it to divine dignity through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Sister Bénigne then changed her state by a new effect of grace, and passed into another, the peculiarity of which was that it gave her intimate unions with the dispositions of the Infant Jesus, and sublime knowledge of that adorable mystery. She entered on it one day by receiving a superabundance of so special a grace, that trying to write something of it, under obedience, she heard a voice which said to her :

"That which thou art writing is not what thou hast received." She did not then know how to explain this new prodigy of mercy, and the same voice said again to her : " Say, and know thyself, that it is a little participation of the grace which Mary received at the moment of the Incarnation of the Word. The Infinite Goodness has given thee a share, by grace and by love, in this union which really took place in Mary." "The Word seemed to say to me by a secret voice" (so she wrote in her memoirs): "' Yes, Bénigne, I communicate to thee by participation the graces of my Incarnation in a manner incomprehensible to thee, and by this mercy I unite myself to all that thou art, by an effect of love wholly divine, as much as is possible to a being living still in an earthly body.' The knowledge which I afterwards received of this ineffable mystery was so clear, that it seemed to me I might say that faith had no more to do with it, but that love alone imprinted it in me rather than showed it to me."

It may be said that in such a state of divine communications, these lights show to the eye of our understanding the truth of these mysteries, as far as it can be comprehended here below : that eye, being purified by grace and made subtle by love, detaches the soul from matter, raises it above its prison and its sensible part and renders it capable of receiving the sublimity of these views.

Still this humble maiden protested to me that she never well understood the greatness of this grace, although it was several times renewed to her: its

effects were holy and sanctifying; they led her to adore continually the sacred dispositions of Jesus abased to the bosom of a lowly virgin, in order to embrace and imitate them.

"Alas! how many times," she said, "have I entered in spirit into the most pure bosom of Mary, to adore there the Eternal Word united hypostatically to the body of an infant of a few moments, of a few hours, of a few days, of a few months old, rendering there to His Father infinite honour by that divine abasement. What great things did I discern in those lowlinesses! What dazzling brightness in the obscurity of that truth; a God made flesh! I adored, I admired, I loved that marvel of divine charity. My love was, I think, most ardent for the Divine Word, and it was in truth a love which could not come from me, but was given to me and imprinted by the Sovereign Spirit of Love, who then did everything in me.

"Once I was instructed that since the undertaking by the Word of the work of man's redemption, our sanctity was in the Will of God, and our salvation was determined on His part; whence it follows that if I fail to acquire perfection I fail to fulfil the divine Will. O God! how faithfully we ought to co-operate with the grace of Jesus!"

Another time, in one of her flights of spirit, she knew that as the *Ecce ancilla* which the Holy Virgin pronounced, drew down the Word into her chaste womb, the first words of this Word made flesh to His Father were these: "*Ecce servus tuus*"—do with me

according to Thy will. That was His first movement, His first occupation, His first desire, His first elevation of spirit, the object of His first look ; as also His first aim was to render to His Father an infinite glory, and in accepting human nature He accepted submission to all His Will.

She writes: "I was generally at this time only occupied with the operations of the Divine Infant, and with His adoration of all the designs of His Father. I saw clearly the love which consumed Him from the first instant of His passible life ; I saw the desire which He had of suffering, and what He suffered in waiting for the sufferings, which were to bring so much glory to God, and grace to the human race. My favourite ejaculatory prayer was: 'Ah! Word made flesh, captive through love, make me find my liberty in the captivity of Thy pure love.'

"I saw, afterwards, this Sovereign Wisdom wrapped in swaddling-clothes, led and ruled by Mary and Joseph ! I saw the Word made dumb by love, the Creator who nourishes every living creature, taking His food from the bosom of a virgin !"

In this state Sister Bénigne was deeply taken up with the desire of loving Jesus and glorifying Him openly ; she felt admirable transports of love in only thinking or saying "Jesus Infant ! Jesus little ! Jesus hidden ! Jesus dumb ! Jesus sleeping ! Jesus solitary ! Jesus praying ! Jesus supplicating ! Jesus adoring and honouring His Father !" These emotions were so much the stronger that she had, as it were, a natural incli-

nation to love the divine secrets. She had most ardent desires that God might be loved worthily through Jesus and in Jesus; that He might be served and glorified in Him by all the earth.

She discerned in the Heart of Jesus that the designs of the Father formed the pleasures of such a Son. She vehemently wished that the only Son of God might be honoured in the only Son of Mary, the All-Mightiness in weakness, and that the Eternal Wisdom might be manifested by the silence of Jesus.

“I would have wished to regulate all my movements by Jesus, and I often said to myself, ‘Recollect, Bénigne, that suffering is thy lot. Love has told thee so; thou must believe it, and accept anew this suffering as the Spirit and the Heart of Jesus have accepted it. The Spirit of Jesus thus subdued ought to subdue mine at the sight of a single one of His submissions.’

“It was by the Heart of Jesus that I saw one day that I was directly opposing the will of God and His goodness to me, by putting off from day to day to commit to writing the mercies without number which He has shown and still shows to my poor soul; and I understood that a child of love ought not to reason so much, but should abandon herself without reserve to the spirit of love.

“One Christmas Eve, I was profoundly occupied with the greatness and sweetness of the mystery of the birth of Jesus, and notwithstanding the inexpressible joy with which it usually inspires my heart, I was penetrated with pain on seeing in a brilliant light

the form of the little human body which the Word Incarnate had taken in order to suffer, and on clearly understanding that He had become flesh only to endure a thousand torments and infinite pains. I learnt then that unless I suffer myself, I do nothing which is perfectly acceptable to love; that I am destined to suffer by everything, in everything, and from all; that sweetness of spirit cannot last long with softness of life; that I am not to expect to find other consolation upon earth than that of loving and glorifying God. Jesus said to me further: 'What canst thou desire that I do not give thee—that I do not let thee find in me, dear Bénigne, my spouse, my sister.'

Once when she was considering (this again was on Christmas Day) the poverty of the Infant Jesus, she profoundly penetrated the value of it; and love made known to her of the happiness of a soul which leaves anything to follow the example of Jesus, through the great recompense which it will receive. She knew the greatness and the worth of that recompense by the plenitude of all grace in the soul of Jesus united to the Word, a plenitude so complete that it seemed to be poured out on all sides, but especially on the souls best disposed by gentleness and peace to receive that grace. "Alas!" said she, "all unworthy as I am, mine had a very good share therein."

On another Christmas she received again an impression of admirable peace, not by means of the angelic song, but by the Hand of Jesus Himself. He took pleasure in enriching with His gifts His dear

spouse, who during the whole time of the duration of that state never left the presence of Jesus and Mary, being as if in a paradise, and filled with graces, with the assurance of obtaining many for several persons, and even for the whole Christian world.

CHAPTER XI.

TENTH INTERIOR STATE—OF ELEVATION IN GOD BY A STRONGER UNION OF LOVE WITH THE PERSON OF THE WORD.

THE Divine Spouse willed to be followed still more closely by His dear spouse, and He called her to seek after His dwelling-place, like the bride of the sacred Canticle, who asked eagerly of all for the place of rest of her Well-beloved, in the fair noon of His love and His glory.* She sought Him, the Word made flesh, in the bosom of Mary where she had enjoyed Him so much; but answer was made to her; *I am no longer there*. She wished to see Him sucking the milk of the virginal breasts of that sweet Mother; and again it was said to her: *I am no longer there*. She sought Him afterwards in all the steps of His life, hidden, submissive, familiar and laborious, but God the Word still said to this loving one: *Non est hic; Non est hic*—He is not there. She received, however, in this search great profusion of lights, and generous

* Cant. i. 7.

courage to undertake the most difficult things for the glory of pure love.

"At last," she says, "I sought this Spouse on the mountain of love; the remembrance of the marks of it which He had given me by His death only detained me there an instant, because it was said to me still more forcibly, 'No, no, Bénigne, the Word is no longer here suffering and dying!' I went to Mary, my good Mother, to pray her to show me whither my Jesus had retired, when Love, seeing me all desolate, taught me that I must rise to the Bosom of the Eternal Father, to seek there the Only Son; that there I should no longer pursue Him in vain, that I should find Him, and possess Him perfectly, and, moreover, that I should be established by an interior state, in this enjoyment for the three following years, and after my death for the eternal years. At the same moment the interior voice informed me that it was from thence that the Word become my Spouse was looking at me, by a continual glance of mercy, and that His dwelling-place was in that inaccessible light. I felt a strong impulse urging me on to unite myself to that Incarnate Wisdom, but a profound sentiment of my vileness withheld me a moment and I cried out, 'Ah, Lord! who am I that I should attain to Thee, so raised on high; who can reach to that place?' He made answer in my interior: *Thou, whose heart I possess by love, and whom I wish to detach from matter.*

"The following morning there was shown to me, I know not how, an infinite brightness, and I heard a

distinct voice saying to me: 'It is here that I am and that thou wilt find me; for in all the steps of my life, where thou has sought me, I am only by representation, by remembrance, and by the sweet sentiment thereof with which I inspire my elect, distributing my graces to those who renew the memory of them with devotion.'

"Then I felt myself separated from all that was sensible in me, in order to enter into the dispositions requisite to obtain the effect of this grace, and I was in an absolute detachment from everything, and in an elevation in God which I have never been able to comprehend, and still less to explain. I have been in it since, almost without interruption, by thought, adoration, union of love, but in a manner so holy that the purity and perfection of that union were a thing to marvel at. I no longer felt myself uniting, but quite united with that single Object of my love."

We may well say here of this fair soul with the sentiments of holy Jacob: Oh, how wonderful is the place where the heart of this humble Bénigne is now! It is not only the House of God, but His sanctuary, His royal and secret cabinet; it is the true gate of Heaven, because by it the soul goes to God, that is to say, by Jesus Christ our Lord, the true Gate of salvation.

She adds—"In this divine union I penetrated in some manner into the greatness and immensity of the glory which God receives by the infinite homage of a God-man. I adored myself this adored and adoring One. I was made to know the value of that pure adoration

and of that sublime state in which my soul was placed by an excess of divine mercy." Here, indeed, Jesus seemed to say to her as formerly to His Apostles: "Bénigne, I no longer speak to thee in parables, but I disclose really to thee what is of my Father, who loves thee because thou lovest me and believest that I am come forth from Him." And it may be added that by the grace of the Word and the power of the Spirit of Love, this soul learnt everything from Him, and by Him was challenged to fly like a little eaglet on its wings, even to that sublime region of uncreated and inaccessible light.

This dear soul experienced no more transports, nor excesses, nor had any other sight than that of the Divine Word in the bosom of His Father. She regarded herself there as in the holy of holies, where the only adoration is offered by the sovereign Pontiff our Lord Jesus Christ alone, and by the soul which He keeps united to Him.

She writes: "My soul in this state enjoys all that it adores, and all that it loves; it no longer knows nor feels anything except that it loves Him whom it adores, and that it adores Him whom it loves, without understanding, without knowing, and without feeling this sentiment except by an imperceptible impulse, loving more than it comprehends."

She has often told me that she seemed to be in God and cleaving to His divine Being as a child clinging to its mother's bosom, deriving sweet nourishment from that inexhaustible Source of all good. She often

heard the Divine Word saying to her as to Philip : " Bénigne, he who sees me sees my Father, I am in my Father, and my Father in me." And the sweet words, " Thou knowest now, my dear soul, that I am in my Father, and thou in me and I in thee ; "and these, " All mine is thine, and thine is mine." " Ah, Jesus !" she exclaimed, " if I am thine, I am also Thy Father's. Grant, Lord, by Thy mercy that Thou mayest be able to say that Thou art glorified in me." " Yes," this sweet Saviour made answer, " I shall be so if you write the graces which I show you, so that they may be published, and by that means my goodness may be known and blessed, and the charm of my love admired and loved."

She once asked me in speaking to me of this state, what I thought of it, and pressed me much to tell her. I answered that I thought it unquestionably the most excellent of all, as being the most apart from our own views, and the most tending to union with God. " Ah ! how you comfort me," she replied, " I see then you understand me. There is indeed nothing, Sister, by which the soul is more penetrated with God than by this interior occupation, where He Himself keeps it in the peaceful and loving calm of a pure and simple look ; but it is at the same time the subject about which we can say least, and I am aware that I have only done so very obscurely and imperfectly."

CHAPTER XII.

ELEVENTH INTERIOR STATE—OF PURE CONTEMPLATION OF THE
SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST DURING HIS PASSION.

I KNOW not how this happy spouse, Sister Jeanne Bénigne, will be able to bring herself to leave the sweet dwelling-place of the very Bosom of the Godhead! she must, however, do so; such is the will of her Spouse. Let us see Him preparing her Himself for the change which He is going to work in this soul so dear to Him. One day then He said to her by His interior word, "My well-beloved, thou must leave, as I did, this adorable Bosom of my Father." She made answer in all simplicity, "Alas! to what end shall I leave this abode where Thy merciful love has placed me?" The Spouse replied, "To come with me to suffer on earth, for the glory of my Father and for His love." "At that word 'suffer,'" she says, "my pain was calmed, and I said to Him at once, 'Jesus, I am ready.' I felt myself immediately penetrated with a sentiment of submission, and I knew that my Spouse wished to honour me by choosing me for a companion, associating me with Him to share His pains, even His death. These words, "I have trodden the winepress alone,"* gave to my heart a lively sentiment of gratitude for the grace which He was showing me. Those other sacred

* Isa. lxi. 3.

words, *considerabam ad dexteram, et videbam, et non erat qui cognosceret me*,* filled me with compassion for Him, and I assured Him of my readiness to follow Him even to Calvary; I only entreated Him to be my portion and my hope in that suffering state, as I hoped that He would be eternally in the state of glory.

“From that moment I was in a state of pure contemplation of the labours and the sufferings of that dear Saviour, and ready to receive anew the whole representation of His holy Passion. The sweet Jesus made me understand that He suffered all His life from the expectation of His future sufferings, the image and the remembrance of which were always before Him. I was then plunged as it were in a sea of bitterness at the sight of all the steps which Jesus had taken in His Passion, the value of which He made me esteem the higher, by discovering to me the oppositions to pain which were in His Person, by the hypostatic union of God the Word; love did not forget to show me the least circumstances of the greatest excess which its force caused.

“I saw those profound abasements of Jesus, those abysses of humiliations, those mortal agonies! I saw the Soul of my Jesus laden with all the sins of the world in order to expiate them. I shared in the sorrows of His Heart, all love and tenderness, feeling to the quick the ingratitude of men. I saw with an overwhelming sadness the insolent contempt which

* Psalm cxli. 5.

they offered to that immortal King; the treasons plotted against Him, the cowardly and false accusations, the deicide condemnation, the triumph of the envy of His enemies, the want of love, of constancy, of fidelity in his dearest friends; all this was shown to me by such a lively and penetrating representation that my heart was thereby filled with extreme sorrow."

The perfections of this suffering God were continually present to the spirit of Sister Jeanne Bénigne, and brought to it impressions of a light so great, that they discovered to her in a marvellous way the merits of this God-man, and the excess of His sufferings. The abandonment of His Eternal Father above all, and the need which this sweet Saviour willed to feel of some consolation from His creatures, but which He found not, deeply touched the heart of Bénigne.

She wrote very little about this state, because love did not often leave her free to do it, so completely did it keep her occupied with these sorrowful sentiments, and as if raised out of herself, a thing which sometimes happened to her when she spoke of it. "Alas!" said she, with sighs that would have rent the hardest heart. "What a sad spectacle it was for me, to see the Spouse, this King and Lord, whom in my pre-vailing states I had seen so great, so beautiful, so sweet, so awful, and so full of majesty, now represented to my eyes, without form, without beauty, and like a hyacinth! This Lamb who is to be our eternal light, covered with spitting, bruised with buffetings and blows! This King Immortal wearing a crown of

thorns, clad in dirty and stinking tatters of purple. That powerful Hand which upholds the machine of the universe, holding for a sceptre a frail reed ! Him who is borne on the wings of the Seraphim and Cherubim, surrounded by an insolent rabble which outrages Him in a thousand ways.

“ Sometimes I addressed the spouse of the Canticles to ask her what had become of the threescore warriors chosen among the valiant ones of Israel, appointed to guard this Spouse, the true Solomon.* I besought Heaven to send them to Him in this pressing need, but a look from the loving Eyes of my Jesus, covered with tears and blood, informed me that He willed suffering, and had no need of the help of all the legions of the blessed Spirits whom He would only have had to call, to be by them punctually served. ‘ I will to suffer without reserve,’ said this Spouse of my heart, ‘ even to the end of my mortal course. My sorrows will never be understood ; the sight of them will form in part your blessedness during eternity, as you will see and know the love which I have had for men by that which I have suffered for their salvation. These infinite torments will infinitely increase the glory of my Father at every moment of a duration which will never end.’ ”

But among all the circumstances of the sorrowful Passion of her Saviour, of which she felt in herself the lively impression, during these three years, that

* Cant. iii. 7.

of the deicide condemnation produced in her soul effects of sorrow and love so vehement, that she only survived them by a kind of miracle. Jesus, touched by her profound sadness, had pity on her, and took her, at that time, no farther in the way of the Cross, reserving for the end of her life these last features of likeness to Him, to the end that she might truly die on the cross with her Divine Spouse, which, as we have seen, was brought about at the epoch of her precious death. Meanwhile, Calvary was her dwelling-place; she there considered the Cross as a throne of love set up by Love itself for the glory of God and for the salvation of men.

I once said to her that I thought this simple, attentive and loving contemplation of the adorable Passion notably oppressed the heart; that it caused wonderful changes in the spirit, making it insensible to all else; and that it completely subdued a certain vivacity and brightness which are so pleasing to the creature. "Ah," she answered, "you are quite right; nothing so reforms the soul, and so mortifies the passions, as the loving view of this divine Passion of my Saviour, and nothing so penetrates the heart as that touching contemplation. You may understand by this the state in which I was during those three years: my human being remained so dead that my days passed away in a kind of agony, though a loving agony. In all that time I never experienced a sentiment of joy, except occasionally from the Holy Communion, which gave me life and strength."

The principal effect which this state produced in this daughter of the Cross, was to increase beyond measure her aversion to sin, in so much that the sight of hell itself, so to speak, would not have terrified her so much as that of a little offence against God; she had then conceived in some manner what pain the malice of one sin has cost the Son of God. "In a heart where pure love reigns," she said, "sin cannot be; I would almost say, not even its shadow."

Bénigne renewed, at this time, a thousand times a day, the offering of herself to the divine justice, to give it glory; and she has often declared to me that since that time she has not been a moment without suffering, either from bodily ills, or from interior martyrdoms.

All that I have just said and related about our humble Sister Jeanne Bénigne's state of contemplation upon the Passion, is nothing in comparison of what she made me understand about it, when transported by love and grief, she spoke of it to me in wonderful terms; but not to make this chapter too long, I reserve for the following one a few of her loving considerations and affections.

CHAPTER XIII.

SEQUEL OF HER PRECEDING STATE—HER SENTIMENTS AND
 MIND IN SOME PARTICULAR PASSAGES OF THE PASSION
 OF HER LORD.

THEY are enter without further prelude, with our Bénéigne, into the Garden of Olives, and let us allow her herself there to unveil the secrets which Love was pleased to reveal to her.

"Alas!" she said, "how often in my suspensions of spirit have I admired this admirable Jesus as He came forth from the Last Supper, wending His way to the Garden of Olives, and passing the torrent of Gethsemane! What an impression of love and compassion was excited in me by the reflection which He made, that at the moment when He had just instituted the divine Sacrament of the Altar, the essence and abridgement of the marvels and the efforts of His love, they were preparing for Him infinite torments and death itself!"

"The grace and the majesty of His gait during that bitter journey were not hidden from me, and my sorrow was increased by the thought of the contempt which they were going to offer to this loving Jesus! His separation from His Apostles, when He only retained with Him three, caused me inconceivable excesses of spirit.

"His retirement to the garden, where He was to be the martyr of His love, made strong impressions on my heart. This Eternal Monarch, who should

be in the world only to reign and make us reign in Him, to gain a sovereignty of love over our hearts; this Divine Lover, whom I had seen on thrones of glory surrounded by a million of Angels; He who, even a few days before was on our earth followed by a multitude of the people, had no companion at this moment but those three Apostles, whom we can hardly believe to be such, so greatly do they fail in zeal, in love, and in eagerness for the service of such a Master!

“I penetrated into a thousand mysteries and sorrowful secrets in these two words: ‘Jesus enters the garden.’ O God! O Love! to what end? Let us see, my soul. To pray to God His Father; to suffer mortal agonies; to be tyrannized over by His very love; to be laden with the heavy burden of the sins of men; to carry them into the presence of His Father in His character of expiator of all our iniquities; to endure sorrows sufficient to deprive of life the Author of Nature Himself; to be seized, in His human nature, by the most lively apprehension of all that was to happen to Him, and of death itself; to suffer the profound humiliation of being consoled by an Angel—His creature; to see there His three most beloved disciples sunk with cowardice in a deep sleep, when He had most need of their faithful assistance; to abase Himself, even to seeking for consolation from these same disciples, and not to find it; to submit Himself again to the commands of His Father; to be there delivered up to death by His own consent,

because this 'free among the dead' so willed it; to begin to shed there His Blood in abundance by the miraculous sweat which the divine ardour of His Heart excited in His body; to conclude there our peace with His Father by His submission to His adorable Will!!! Yes; it was among the olives of this garden that this marvellous peace between God and man was made; that by a *fiat* uttered by the adorable mouth of Jesus Christ the great miracle was wrought which appeased an angry God and merited the salvation of man. Merciful *fiat* of Jesus, which delivered us from the nothingness of sin, far worse than that of nature, whence another *fiat* of this same Word had brought us forth in like manner!

"The First, almighty, gave us our being; and the Second, in pure mercy, gave us a new heart capable of His grace, which can merit life eternal.

"It was, moreover, in this garden that we were made members of this sacred Head by love, since the same sole love, pressing His divine Heart, caused to issue therefrom that abundant sweat of blood of infinite merit for our redemption. It was there that He, as our Head, accepted death by sacrifice, by love, by submission; the death which was only due to our sins.

"To signify this peace to His Apostles He returned to them for the third time, saying, 'Sleep on now in peace.' Oh! what mysteries have I come to understand in these few words!!!

"Adam found his death and ours in a garden, and in a garden Jesus accepts and gives Himself up to

death to give back life to us, and to open to us His paradise !

“The sorrows which the Heart of Jesus suffered in this garden cannot be understood” (said this daughter of the Divine Heart, the humble, the gentle Bénigne); “an infinite love alone caused them, and an infinite love alone could sustain that heart amid the pangs which oppressed it !”

Therefore the well-beloved disciple covers, as with a sad curtain, the first scene of this adorable tragedy, saying only these words: “*Jesus entered the garden with His disciples,*” as if he wished to say that it was only the love of the heart of Jesus which could tell us what passed there. The devout Bénigne entered deeply into the bitterness and the sorrows which this Divine Heart suffered in this sad garden. It was her mystery, the centre of her sorrowful love, and the subject of her most devout and tender affections. “In a word,” she said, “it is the secret of love of the true lovers of Jesus; it is there that they find this true and incomparable Lover alone, speaking of love, working love, suffering by love, and teaching His friends the secrets of the love of His Divine Heart.”

It was in the depth of this night that our Bénigne found wonderful light, which enabled her to distinguish the features of the sorrow which pierced the loving Heart of Jesus, herself sensibly participating in the pains, sadness, pangs, distresses, bitterness, troubles, weariness; in a word, in all that formed

the sorrowful and secret Passion of this adorable Heart.

But it is time to see the adorable Saviour meeting the traitor Judas. Love showed him to Bénigne, followed by an armed band. Ah ! what a sorrowful sight for her loving soul ! These mere thoughts put her almost into a swoon : " The only Son of God betrayed in Jesus by an Apostle ! the Light of the World sought for in a dark night ! Jesus, the incomparable and the true friend of our souls, forsaken by His own ! Jesus, who gives us so much in that He gives Himself, sold at so low a price ! Jesus, who contains all good in Himself, and is our sovereign Good, delivered up for thirty pieces of money ! The Eternal Power defenceless ! the Incarnate Wisdom surprised and arrested as a criminal ! Jesus, like a gentle lamb, alone in the midst of so many wolves ! " She repeated over and over again these truths, which caused her violent excesses of love. " The torments of the Heart of Jesus," said she, " were clearly represented to me, and pierced my soul with so sharp a pain that I knew full well that I was united to a Man of sorrows, who being also God-man, beatified me with Himself at the same time that He made me suffer."

She joined the beloved disciple to follow Jesus with him ; but, like him, she could not speak of the sad kiss of the most perfidious of the children of men, saying that love alone could explain to the heart of man the sorrow of that of Jesus at this step !

Bénigne was made to understand these sweet words of the gentle Saviour: "Whom seek ye?" and she was struck by a mortal dart at that pitiless cry—*Jesus of Nazareth!* But it became far more painful at the words, "I am He." She told me, "I was then held as it were in a profound rapture which lasted many days, repeating and penetrating who He was who uttered those gentle words—'I am He.' Then, recovering as it were, I felt some alleviation of my sorrow when I saw that the force of that gentleness had struck down to the ground all those furious men! I sank deeper than I can say in this consideration of the love of Jesus, who being the Master, free, delivered Himself by His own choice into the hands of His enemies! and what had been my consolation redoubled my sufferings. I considered the nobleness of this Spouse; I was shown the care which He had of His own, and my soul was thereby lovingly moved to pity; and still more when I looked at Jesus in the hands of sinners. The All-Powerful, the Almighty, tied, bound! The Essential Holiness outraged! My Saviour treated as the lowest of men, dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, which had thousands and thousands of times been witnesses of His wonderful works." "Jesus!" she cried out, day and night in the most remote places of the monastery, "Jesus who takes care of His own, abandoned by all in His greatest distress! Ah! who can express what one feels on seeing all this by the eye of pure contemplation, and what one suffers when the impression of

these painful scenes is felt in the soul ! Then it was that love made me comprehend what was Jesus bound, Jesus dragged, Jesus seized and treated as a criminal, Jesus struck, Jesus abandoned ; knowing what He was I understood the better what He endured. Yes, they were unheard of sufferings which the Heart of Jesus endured, that divine Heart, so good, so generous, so tender !

“ My only resource was to join myself to St. John, the faithful disciple of Jesus, and I strove with him, methinks, whether of us twain should follow Him most closely.”

After this, Bénigne considers and follows Jesus before the tribunals. “ Jesus, Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, before a mortal judge ! Jesus accused as a criminal ! Jesus charged with imposture and calumnies ! Jesus denied by an Apostle who seemed most zealous for Him ! All are silent in His defence, all are silent for the Word whose word brought us out of nothing ; and all cry out to accuse Him, and all speak to afflict Him ! Jesus questioned as to His doctrine ! Jesus struck on the face by a man from the dregs of the people ! Oh ! how painfully was that blow felt by the noble Heart of Jesus ! Jesus is the judged guilty of death by the deicide high priest, who will himself accomplish the prophecy he had made, or rather which God had made him utter with his execrable mouth : it is expedient that one man die for the salvation of all.

“ I saw again this generous Saviour, this amiable

Jesus, denied for the second and third time, but by whom? By an enemy? By a stranger? By one who has never been especially loved by His adorable Heart? Ah! no, by no means. Jesus is shamefully disowned and denied by the first of the Apostles. Yes, by that Peter who has not only shown, not only promised, but sworn, a love proof against all; who has confessed Him to be the Christ, who has acknowledged Him to be the Son of the Most High.

“Alas! Jesus deigned Himself to speak to the heart of His unworthy Bénigne, and told her that the sorrow of His heart was so full and so bitter at the sight of the ingratitude of this Apostle, that were it not for a miracle of the strength of His love, He should have breathed forth His soul when He turned upon him that powerful look which brought him back to his duty, to repentance, to penance, and called him to the life of grace, to holiness, and to His love.”

Nothing took place in that horrible night when Light was under the power of darkness which Bénigne did not see and meditate upon, by a sorrowing contemplation of the Passion of her Divine Spouse.

She often passed the hour of dawn on the great day of our salvation, which was to see the death of the Creator of the universe, in considering with tender affections which made her shed torrents of tears, the horrors which were going to be committed against her Jesus. She prayed the sun to go back in order to delay His sorrow, and at other times she urged it to

hasten its course, to satisfy the eager desires which Jesus felt to suffer for the glory of God and the salvation of men.

Then she saw Jesus led to Pilate to be by him condemned to death, with no other cause or formality but that the people declared Him to be guilty, and that had He not been so they would not have delivered Him up to him. Bénigne followed Jesus led to Herod, and sent back again by him to Pilate, after having arrayed Him and treated Him as a madman in punishment of His having willed to make him no answer. This silence of Jesus made Bénigne break forth in those expressions which she often repeated, "Ah! what woe when Jesus is silent with sinners, and suffers their outrages without a word!!!"

She swooned at the sight of the Saviour arrayed in the white robe which Herod put upon Him. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "are these the magnificent garments of glory and light in which I have so often seen Thee clad, O my adorable Spouse? Is this the recompense they give Thee for having filled all Israel with the grace and truth of Thy words? Ah! Sovereign Wisdom, generous Jesus, do they treat Thee as a fool? Alas! they still do it, even now, when the ways of Thy Cross are accounted folly."

She said that Jesus had suffered to extremity on this occasion, because this contempt was in direct opposition to the perfection of the Word, who is Essential Wisdom. She often remained as if lifeless in considering those words which He said to Pilate:

"My Kingdom is not of this world." "O Eternal Monarch, King of kings, what is this thy sad refusal to be the King of this world? Ah! how unhappy is it if Thou wilt not have it for Thy Empire! It is because Thou foreseest, O my Saviour, the ingratitude of men towards Thee, and their blindness, which will cause them to make a bad use of the free will Thou has left them, as if to little kings, children of God, by withdrawing from Thy just sovereignty to cast themselves under the tyranny of the prince of darkness. Ah! The Heart of Jesus felt also at that time an inexhaustible sorrow at the sight of the bitter resistances which His elect would sometimes make, instead of giving themselves up promptly and lovingly to his divine disposal. Yes, my Saviour was touched at foreseeing the sins of the human race, and such a great number of relapses after this copious redemption. He had before Him too the want of love in His dearest friends, which would stay the torrent of His graces, and hinder them from flowing gently and swiftly into them."

Bénigne often fell into sorrowful faintings, and passed whole nights in the single contemplation of the pain of the Heart of Jesus on seeing Himself all alone in the midst of the wicked, when no one took the trouble to address a word of consolation to Him. "In my excesses," she said, "I did all in my power to take Him out of those deicide hands, trying, by my prayers and poor penitential exercises, to hinder the fall of some sinner; and when I obtained the conversion

of some souls, I presented them to Jesus to console Him.

“ My Angels alone on certain occasions were able to sustain me in my mortal anguish, when I witnessed the ungrateful preference given by the Jews to Barabbas before Jesus, Sovereign King, only Son of the great God who has called that nation His people.” She often called out to them with sorrowful sighs, “ Alas ! to what point are you going, to wish for the deliverance of so wicked a man, by the death of your true Lord, who has heaped His benefits upon you ? . . . Love made me penetrate the loving sensibility of the Heart of Jesus at this passage, and painted it to me in such lively colours that there is none, methinks, which has so forcibly struck me. The Angels showed me their astonishment, and said to each other in plaintive tones which they bore to my ear : Bénigne, Barabbas is preferred to Jesus !!! Jesus and Barabbas are reckoned together and put in the same rank ! Barabbas is chosen by the people of God, and Jesus is rejected and condemned ! Ah ! dear spouse of this King of glory, weep, and charge all loving souls to weep often for this point of the Passion of Jesus, who will reward in glory those who shall have tried to console Him particularly for this terrible sorrow of His Heart. Pray that it may cease, by preventing its prolongation through the preference which man so often gives to the creature, forsaking this good Lord, Creator and Redeemer ! ”

She was astonished with a holy horror at human

inconsistency in the Jews, who had lately proclaimed Jesus Son of David and Son of God, and who condemned Him now to death. She assured me she had remained lifeless a thousand times, struck by this cry: *Tolle, tolle, crucifige eum*; but that it was not possible to speak on the subject. "Ah," she said, "console Jesus on this point, and often invite our Sisters to do so, adoring with the tenderest love the terrible sorrow of this loveable Heart."

After these ignominies St. John seems to make us hear, as Bénigne often exclaimed in these three years, "What is left for Jesus sharper and more difficult to bear?" when he says in so few words, that Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him, the soldiers made a crown of thorns and put it upon His Head, and after having clothed Him in a purple robe, they struck Him and said: 'Hail! King of the Jews.' "Ah!" said Bénigne, "beloved disciple, why do you relate so curtly these abysses of suffering of our adorable Master? I have penetrated as it were into them, I have borne a small part of their impression, they have been shown to me by the love itself of Jesus, and I think I may say I have understood them as far as a simple and miserable creature is capable of doing.

"Love has taught me this loving truth, that the prodigious number of the lashes of the scourge were an alleviation for Jesus, because the shedding of so much blood enlarged His divine Heart, which was devoured by the ardour of His love and by the desire of suffering; and although that terrible flagellation made Jesu

suffer an infinite torment, it satisfied at the same time His loving affection for us. This adorable Lamb showed all His opened veins to God and to man, as so many characters of love which spoke eloquently to God to appease Him, to man to touch him. Yes, Jesus Himself told me this secret, so lovingly sorrowful, and moreover, that the hardness of heart of His executioners, present and future, was at this moment His greatest pain. During the silence which He then kept, He spoke of our peace to His Father, offering to Him His Wounds, His thorns, and the streams of blood which He shed, the least drop of which rendered to Him a glory infinite and incomprehensible to any other than this Divine Father, who alone knew its price and worth."

Sister Bénigne next considered Jesus exposed to the people as an object of pity and of touching compassion. She heard those words of Pilate : *Ecce Homo!* She saw the hard-heartedness of the Jews : she heard the horrible cries of the people who called for the death of Jesus. "Alas !" said she, "I was in despair when I saw that He who rewards even mere desires, even good will, finds no heart on His side on that day when His own suffers a thousand deaths for all, because those who have some little love left for Him, are silent and dare not say a word !—they will not own Him !—they will not have Him for their King ! They like Cæsar better than Jesus !

"After that Love Himself became silent, and could speak no more to me of the sensibilities of the Heart

of Jesus, in seeing the ingratitude of men pushed to extremity. St. John, who had been taught the loving secrets of this adorable Master, when he lay on His Bosom at the Last Supper, imitates His love in passing so lightly over all these points in the Passion of Jesus, and shows me that no one can speak on so mournful a subject. Let us end then with these sad words : Jesus is condemned to death ! ! !”

Here this loving one ceases to write, not being able to give adequate expression to what she felt and understood in these sorrowful words, which were her principal occupation, as we have seen, during her eleventh state of contemplation of the sorrows of her Divine Spouse.

“ Some of these sad accents,” she said, “rang unceasingly in the ears of my heart : Jesus capable of suffering ! Jesus suffering ! Jesus disfigured ! Jesus forsaken of all ! Jesus afflicted and sad unto death ! Jesus in the hands of His enemies, given up to their power ! This Jesus, whom I had so long seen, known, loved, and adored, an Object so worthy of admiration, was now only an Object of my pity : but pity which imprinted in my soul a sorrow so acute that it surpassed all expression. I passed long nights in this state of death, only repeating, The love of His Heart is then forgotten ! This Jesus, my sovereign happiness, is plunged into a sea of sorrow and bitterness ! My Lover betrayed ! My King crowned with thorns ! The Almighty bound ! The image of God buffeted ! The Eternal Wisdom treated as mad ! The Infinite Good-

ness refused, disowned ! The Essential Holiness put in competition with a robber ! The Object of the delight of Heaven bearing in the presence of His Father my iniquities, my ingrati- tudes, and those of all men ! Love alone caused all these excesses in Jesus, for He suffered so much only because He loved us so much ! This sight of the Heart of Jesus, urged by love for me, wounded mine with a dart which passed quite through it, and cast it into an abyss of sorrow. At other times I felt consumed by the ardour which this divine Heart diffused over mine ; I was so dried up by this fire of love, that I know not how my bones still held together.

“ Love has taught me that nothing does more honour to Jesus than compassion for the sorrows of His Heart, which alone have enabled me to enter into the others : it is in this Heart that I have understood the abase- ment of Jesus ! Jesus abased under the heavy burden of sin, Jesus loving our salvation, Jesus desiring the glory of His Father, and Jesus procuring and working out this glory, this salvation.”

CHAPTER XIV.

TWELFTH INTERIOR STATE—OF UNION WITH THE CRUCIFIED
HUMANITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

AND now what remained to the Divine Spouse in order to complete His favours to His spouse but to make her go up to the summit of the palm-tree* there to take hold of its fruit. Yes, this loving soul, after her past sufferings, must enter into her Lover's bed of repose : but what will that bed be but the Cross on which she was placed, to be crucified there with Him and to live there a life of love. I will here state what she has written about this in her memoirs.

“ One day, being extremely oppressed by my sufferings and by the sight of my infidelities, I went to throw myself at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, having before my eyes all the good of God in me, and all the evil which I do. As I thought thus, I looked up to the crucifix which is above the choir-grate, and it was said to me, ‘ Thy glory is in the Cross, and the Bridegroom and Bride shall have the same throne by an effect of grace and love.’ I then saw myself in the shadow of the adorable crucified One, like a little crucified one, fastened to His Cross by the same nails which held Him there. Sundry bright rays of marvellous beauty, issuing from His Wounds,

* Cant. vii. 8.

pierced my hands and my feet and caused me sharp and supernatural pains, although I cannot say that I really suffered, because those same pains were accompanied and followed by a sweet and divine reaction, and by a most desirable ardour of love : in such a way that in this state I felt myself not only pierced by love, but if I may so express myself, I was either all love, or love had become one with me."

She once had some fear of fully abandoning herself to the operation of this grace, as she did not understand how she could see herself on the Cross when she was really on her knees ; but her Divine Spouse assured her by His secret word of the truth of this mercy, and taught her that it was only by representation that she was there, and that the Spouse was there also in that way : since "my dwelling," He said, "is in the inaccessible light ; it is only to make thee comprehend the state in which I have placed thee, of union with my crucified Humanity, a state in which thou shalt remain for some time, by which thou shalt receive infinite advantages, and which shall make thee as one of the blessed. It is in this state that I have saved man, that I have glorified my Father. This grace is only communicated to thee in spirit and in heart, for we are neither of us upon this cross ; but my loving-kindness unites me to thee, and my grace unites thee to me, in the dispositions of a soul crucified by love, and I feel for thee the same tenderness which I felt for thy soul in particular upon the Cross ; and so our mutual love unites us there by this same suffering. Thou

wilt see also by this interior representation that if thy soul, crucified with me, beholds itself in me, it will see itself marvellously imprinted there, as in a most clear mirror."

After six years passed in this manner, the Divine Word, to fill up the measure of His mercy, spoke to her these interior words ; *My spouse, it is more befitting our love that thou shouldst enclose thyself within myself.* " O God !" she exclaimed when she related this grace to me, " who can explain the greatness of such a mercy, which was given to me in an instant. Yes, love hid me in Jesus, I was in the adorable Heart of my Saviour, where I remained during three whole years as if lost to myself." The spirit of love continued to plunge Sister Bénigne ever deeper and deeper in the Heart of Jesus, and was there like the dove in the cleft of the rock ; she found her safety there, and was given to understand that she had nothing more to fear ; that she was there as in an impregnable fortress, and in a kingdom of peace ; her repose was profound, and during this time she had no trouble about her ways.

This is what she wrote on this subject : " My confidence in Jesus was sweet, and free from all doubt ; and I may say that I was in possession of a communion of love with the Saviour ; but a love so tender, so intimate, and, if I may dare to say it, so familiar, that I was made sure of the truth of those words which Love pronounced within my soul ; that if I was God's by justice, He too was mine by mercy, and that union between this great All and my nothingness was made

so perfect by grace and by love, that I was even more Jesus than Bénigne; and so I often took the liberty of calling Him my Myself. But this is a grace which cannot be expressed."

This state was so exalted and so hidden in God that no words can describe it. It cannot be made intelligible in any way except by saying that this child of grace at that time experienced in her soul the truth of those words of the great Apostle: *Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*,* "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."

CHAPTER XV.

THIRTEENTH AND LAST INTERIOR STATE—THE LOOK OF GOD
UPON HER—PERFECT UNION OF HER SOUL WITH HER
SOVEREIGN GOOD.

THE Divine Spouse being assured that His humble lover Bénigne now looked at Him with a single look, by which she wounded His sacred Heart, was constrained, if we may say so, by His very love to turn in like manner His adorable eye upon her; and by this look He gave her the enjoyment of God without the intervention of any image, or variety of sensible emotions. This state was not again changed, but formed her interior occupation to the end of her life, when she passed from the grace of

* Gal. ii. 20.

that sacred look to that of the divine kiss of her Spouse, and entered into the full possession of Him, and into the glorious state of perfect union, to which we have every reason to believe she has attained.

This look, according to what she herself has said of it, conveyed to her soul varied and different graces, as in her state of excess ; but they were all more removed from sensible things, and brought her into that mystical and loving simplicity which gives the disposition most proper for the union of the soul with the pure and simple Being of God. Up to this time, this devout maiden had found difficulty in persuading herself that the intellectual may be wholly separated from the sensible, because of the connexion which they appear to have with each other. She had always thought that as the senses can perceive nothing but by the life of the soul, the soul also could not be occupied with and united to the Sovereign Good without its making the body, which is united to it, participate in some small portion of the pleasures which it enjoys, especially as the body, by means of penance and mortification, aids it to enter more deeply into spiritual things ; but she was taught that the soul grows, as it were, more divine in proportion as it sustains the divine operations more purely, more simply, and less sensibly, without suffering any hindrance by the agitation of its own returns upon itself, and upon the very graces which it receives from God. And thus what had hitherto been allowed to Bénigne, as well as to the great King David, that she should

taste and see how sweet the Lord is, had been forbidden her in this last state, when her Spouse did not leave unpunished the least dwelling upon the merciful profusions of grace which she received, unless He Himself had enjoined it to gladden and refresh her ; after the sort of the bride of the Canticles, whom He sometimes led to visit His pleasant places in the fields, to gather there the apple and the fruits. But I will let her give her own explanation, and set down faithfully what she has written on this subject :

“God made me suffer in an extraordinary way through a whole Lent, and gave me to understand that He willed to find me dead to everything at the holy Festival of Easter. On Good Friday He gave me wonderful views on the diversity of the operations of grace, and on the co-operation which the Divine Goodness requires of the soul. On Holy Saturday I received (if I am not mistaken) a loving confirmation of love ; on the great Day of Easter I understood, I loved, I admired, I adored the diversity of the divine looks on my soul. Merciful looks of grace, of love, of providence, and of continual care for that same soul, which love had given up to grace, and which bore its impression. But, O God ! who will ever understand the immensity and the prodigy of grace contained in these words alone : God’s look on the soul !” This was so plainly shown to her, and so strongly impressed on her, that she would have been able to speak learnedly upon it if she had had occasion and leisure to write on these high and sublime matters.

"My peace," she continues, "is so profound in this perception of God's sacred look upon His miserable Bénigne, that it sweetens everything, as well as the interior word which, as it were, conveys to me the effect of this look, so that if the continuation of this desirable peace is promised me by the word, my soul is sensible, at the same time, that the Divine Eye looking upon it impresses the peace upon it, and increases it to such a degree that it makes it imperturbable; and in this repose I find myself in God without knowing how I entered there, nor how I remain there, nor how I am treated there, and not trying to see or know how all this takes place. God! at this Name alone my heart is drawn to Him and sunk in Him, and I give myself up entirely to this attraction!

"God is pleased sometimes to make me see that His divine Eye, by its sacred look, conveys to me a great light, which, darting into me one of its life-giving rays, quickens me with new life. At other times this look reduces me to an extreme languor of love, and I become weary of bearing the prolongation of my natural life, so vehement is the desire which it excites in me of the full possession of my Spouse in the life eternal; then, by a contrary effect, it shows me that it is His good pleasure that I should continue to live; and then I submit to this humbly and lovingly. To comfort me, He tells me that He will make me suffer, and that His desires will be accomplished by my prayers and sufferings."

I wanted once to make her give a better explanation

tion of this, but the thought of her own nothingness immediately filled her with such confusion that she has since told me that if I did not surprise her in some of the violent transports into which the divine look threw her, she could tell me nothing of their impression of grace, especially of that which she received from the sensible presence of the Majesty of God. "At these moments," she said, "this presence overwhelms and sinks me into the centre of my nothingness. From this view I am carried on to that of my All, and I feel then that His looks of love lift me up to Him in a manner so sublime that I think it cannot be explained." She was not, however, exempt from trouble in this peaceful and happy state, for in it, as she declares in her writings, she was sometimes subject to darkness and the anguish of desolation.

"Alas! in this state so pure, so holy, and so marvellous, I experienced sometimes an interior abandonment so extreme that I was reduced to a kind of inability of acting by love; in terrible anxiety of spirit, in mortal sadness, and in a fear of reprobation which deprives me, methinks, of the power of invoking to my aid the holy Name of God; only holding on to Him by a grain of confidence, and by the abandonment which leaves me nothing but a small remainder of faith and love; and even that remainder I am not always conscious of, so much does the weight of sin make itself felt, and so greatly do I endure in myself its sorrowful consequences. At that time I feel nothing good in my soul, except submission to God's good

pleasure, and that only resides there imperceptibly. Then all at once a glance of my Well-beloved falls upon me and scatters all this darkness, drying up the source of my tears by the joy which it diffuses over my poor heart, so that I can indeed say, with the royal Prophet, 'My heart receives from Thee the effect of Thy consolations in proportion to the affliction which has oppressed me,' and with St. Paul, 'I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations.'*

"Thus I am instructed, consoled, animated, purified, and made perfect by His powerful and sweet looks; I should, I believe, be even sanctified by them if I put no hindrance in their way."

When I had finished my first memoirs I continued, especially as I was her Superior, to speak often to her, and she declared to me that she was still in the same grace, but that her impressions were more simple and pure; that she now never read nor heard anything of God which could be new to her; that no acquaintance with His truths any longer surprised her, nor even any of His mercies, because she had received so many. I once told her that I believed her to be so penetrated with God that she had now only to enjoy Him, since I could not but suppose that the obligation she was under of answering to His merciful bounties must leave her no longer free to live to herself, and I was indeed persuaded that Jesus lived in her. She

* 2 Cor. vii. 4.

replied with profound humility, " Ah ! my Mother, I must indeed tell you and confess that I hope this great God, infinite in goodness, is pleased to live in me, since He makes my life so dead to all which is not He, and keeps my soul separated from all matter. I see Him alone in everything, and I no longer see myself, except to feel sensibly, be it ever so little, the sweetness of His merciful looks, and I will even go so far as to say that it seems to me God lives in His poor miserable Bénigne."

Sometimes she came to me to say, " My Mother, God by His divine looks has made me feel to-day so many of His sweet amiablenesses (this was her own expression) that I am wholly gladdened and strengthened thereby; do not be uneasy about my pains, the powerful charm of the interior voice has been added to His look, and these two graces united together are quite enough to deliver me from death."

In a word, we may indeed say that the soul of dear Bénigne, by the divine union, by the various operations of grace, by the motions, unction, and inflamed darts of love, had passed into God, was penetrated and filled with God, was as if lost in Him, during these latter years; and that in other ways purified, beautified, perfected, and, so to speak, divinised by so many supernatural sufferings, which were acknowledged as such by several learned and experienced directors, it was well disposed by grace to receive this vision of God, and to go and enjoy it in the abode of glory.

A COLLECTION OF SEVERAL WRITINGS
OF
SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE
CONCERNING HER RETREATS.

IT was by the exercise of the holy annual retreats ordered by our holy Founder, and practised with such great spiritual profit by all his daughters, that God drew the devout Jeanne Bénigne apart to speak more closely to her heart, and to allure her so entirely to Himself that she could not exactly discern whether she were in Heaven or on earth ; nor was she able to commit them all to writing, telling me that she had received in certain years graces which could not be explained. I shall therefore only here relate twenty of them, from her notes which I have found, arranging them myself according to the order which has seemed to me to agree best with her interior states, for in her short papers there were very few dates. I shall not include in this number the retreat she made before taking the habit, which will be preliminary to the others, as it contains the resolutions on which she based all her religious life. She made it under the direction of the venerable Mothers

Péronne-Marie de Châtel, her Superior, and Marie Aimée de Rabutin, her mistress of novices.

She begins thus: "O my God, I hope under the protection of Thy holy Mother, and of my Angel Guardian, to obtain Thy powerful help to practise the good which I propose and prescribe to myself.

"I will first labour all my life to submit my own judgment, that I may the better follow Thy holy Will, and accommodate myself more easily to the just wishes of my Sisters and of my neighbour.

"I will in my conversation closely watch all my words, and as far as I can, I will not speak any superfluous ones.

"I firmly resolve, by the aid of Thy grace, to be gentle and cordial towards all.

"I will especially take heed to that continual presence of God which is enjoined me, so as never to lose sight of it, that I may find there in all my needs, my lights, and a loving conformity to His good pleasure.

"I will be simple and not answer my superiors, suppressing all my own views.

"I will be respectful towards all, and very silent.

"I will serve and please my Sisters, anticipating their desires by gentle charity in whatever I may.

"I will carefully abstain from interfering without cause in other people's business, and be content to help everybody by my little prayers.

"I will keep myself sincerely humble, and will try to edify others by a respectful behaviour, not disapproving or controlling their actions.

“Purity of intention, and love for my own abjection shall be the foundations of all my little spiritual economy.

“I will give my poor opinion frankly and simply when I shall be asked, because our worthy Mother has enjoined this on me.”

Our venerable Foundress, Mother de Chantal, when she had seen all these resolutions, said to her :—“My child, the attention is here directed to too many things, for you who are called to the happy simplicity and unity of love; you must learn that charity is the abridgment of all perfection. Do simply all that you do for the pure love of God, and to please Him, let that be your great and only care, and He will bless you, my child.” She did this perfectly, and nevertheless, without fatigue of spirit, she still practised all her good resolutions; thus continually progressing, she perfected and simplified her views still more, as may be judged by her Retreats which she begins thus :—

“BLESSED BE JESUS.

“Under obedience I put down here what I have experienced in my retreats. I always enter upon them, by divine grace, with a spirit detached from everything which is not God, or which does not concern His glory and charity, in the thought that this one will be the last of my life.

“My first intention is to join myself to that of our holy Founder when he appointed these retreats for us. I suppose that this was to make us greatly glorify God,

and to advance the sanctification of the souls which shall be happy enough to make them humbly, fervently, and with great love. The same love will assuredly impart great graces to those who shall faithfully occupy themselves with God in these retreats, or who shall let themselves be occupied with Him and by Him at His Will."

"FIRST RETREAT.

"I asked of God the dispositions necessary to make it well and to occupy myself in it, as He would have me; to this end I applied a Communion, begging our Lord to give me a director who should lead me in His ways. He deigned to teach me His Will by these interior words: 'Daughter, revive thy faith, have confidence and assurance in my truth, and set all thy hope firmly in me; let thy submission to my Will and to the impulses of my grace be complete.'

"At the Communion of the second day His loving-kindness said to me: 'I accept the offering of thy vows, and I will be thy Director.' These words brought me an abundance of peace, and as they were singing at the Communion, according to the custom of the Order, that verse of Psalm 118, *Viam justificationum tuarum instrue me*, &c., my divine Director made me apply myself to those words, and during those ten days I was instructed, directed, consoled by Him alone.

"In my annual confession I considered Jesus as Sovereign Priest; I hope and believe that by the words of His representative I received a general absolution;

for it was accompanied by an operation and unction quite interior, which issued from the Heart of my Jesus.

“I saw that I was created for Heaven, and that by submitting to the commands of God and being tractable to the divine inspirations, I shall enter easily into that holy city.

“I also learnt afresh that I must carry my virtue to the highest point of perfection of the pure and divine love.

“ SECOND RETREAT.

“I entered into it with the disposition of a true return to God by love, with such a desire of possessing Him, that one would have said I was only then beginning my union with Him. The Spouse said to me: ‘I am here, love thy God, my dove;’ He made my soul sensible of Him in a wonderful manner.

“I was, however, free to occupy myself a little with the consideration of the four ends of man, and I had great understanding of the majesty and glory in which Jesus will appear as Sovereign Judge at the last day, that Great Day which will be terrible to the wicked and glorious to the elect.

“I wished for that day so favourable to the glory of Jesus by the vengeance which he will take on His enemies, and by the reward which His friends will receive from His munificent mercy. That eternal Monarch, God-man, that immortal Spouse, then

promised me the assistance of His glorious Mother for the time of my last agony, and the hour of my death.

“Jesus my Love would not that my thoughts should dwell upon hell, and said to me, “My dove, that place is made for those only who refuse to adhere to my Will, and who will neither love nor obey.

“Afterwards He made me enter into His Heart as into a fortress of love, where I found a sweet assurance. Love occupied me with a fulness of grace, and gave me a glimpse of Paradise, its greatness, its goodness, its eternal love. He willed that in Communion I should receive Him as my eternal life, and made me consecrate my life to His eternal love.

“THIRD RETREAT.

“I entered into it to lay myself open before the eye of God as nothingness, leaving Him to act as a Sovereign over me, reserving to myself nothing but the desire to do penance.

“I was consoled about the judgment by the thought of the gentle St. Bernard, that the faults forgiven by Holy Love will not be known in that day, because pure love purifies and beautifies all things.

“That I may correspond to this immense charity, I will avoid even the shadow of an imperfection, I will suffer everything, permitting all to chastise in me everything which is contrary to the spirit of Jesus, without troubling myself about anything that may be said. Ah! this purity of spirit is indeed seen in my Order! and this binds me to live therein in the most

exact observance. If I do this, I do all that God requires of me.

“ I must know myself and know God ; sunk in my nothingness I see better His greatness and majesty, a sight which plunges me into an abyss of reverence, in which the soul of poor Bénigne is, as it were, lost. I was in an excess of holy fear, and was told for the first time these words from the book of Esther, ‘ the law is not for thee.’

“ FOURTH RETREAT.

“ I was sensible of a salutary trembling at appearing before the Divine Majesty, laden with my infidelities, and could find no peace till Prime the next day, when I heard our Sisters singing the verse, ‘ *Ostende nobis Domine, misericordiam tuam ;*’ and then when I had gone up to our cell, a gentle divine communication restored my calmness.

“ I made my confession, and God gave me an extraordinary discernment ; I hoped for a great amendment by the help of my Mother Mary ; I received signal favours from her, and was then in a joy which could only emanate from the Holy Spirit.

“ Love gave me an increase of familiar approach to God, and I adored Divine Providence in my past tribulations ; then such a profusion of graces was poured into my soul, that it could only be a divine Hand that could give so many at once. I was established in confidence, and in the knowledge that all good comes from God.

"FIFTH RETREAT.

"I laid myself before my Judge as a criminal who asks to be punished; I bound myself by an interior renewal of my vows, so that Jesus called me His voluntary slave. After that only one feeling remained to me, that of the love which the following words gave me: 'Thou art mine and I am thine.' I was admitted in a wonderful manner into the presence of God; I saw that the least thought of pride is a great obstacle to a soul's being employed in glorifying God, and that the truly humbled heart alone gives glory to His Divine Majesty.

"Jesus asked me to give the fruit of this retreat for the peace of Poland and for the preservation of the Faith in that kingdom, which at that time was running great risks from the invasion of the Swedes. After a moment's hesitation I willingly made the sacrifice and said, 'Yes, Lord, I strip myself of all that Thou hast allowed me to gain in this retreat, to the end that Thy mercy may abound in Poland, and I beg of Thee grace for her.'

"I prayed one day to the Holy Virgin and was shown what a soul is which is lovingly abased. Its beauty appeared to me almost divine. I saw that in proportion as it went deeper into the thought of its lowness, it was raised in God like a star in its sphere.

"I learnt that I ought to be prodigal, especially in gratitude towards my well-beloved Sovereign; that we ought to consider His benefits only with the view of acknowledging them to be from Him.

“The interior voice added also that he who most loves God will be the most beloved by Him ; that my way, as a daughter of the Visitation, was a way of love ; and that love and humility alone distinguished us from others in the eyes of God.

“ SIXTH RETREAT.

“God gave Himself to me as my model ; I beheld Him present in everything, as well as the prodigious number of His graces in my regard. Delaying my confession was a trouble to me, as I feared that it was an obstacle to the divine union ; but at holy Communion Jesus made me feel His love as if I were all on fire. In this same retreat, I saw myself covered as it were with the merits of the precious Blood of Jesus Christ ; my heart was filled with its life-giving warmth as if it had just been shed at that same moment ; its effects were prodigious, great and merciful. It is from this inexhaustible source of the precious Blood of our Divine Master that I draw benefits for all.

“After a thousand darts of love, with which Love transfigured me by His holy teachings, the power of the divine operation, and all this abundance of mercy, brought me into an expiring state and made me cry out, ‘ Ah ! God, what will Thy immense glory be, if this single ray kills me ! ’

“In this solitude Love laid to my charge that I had done a good action, while I omitted some circumstance which would have made it better.

"SEVENTH RETREAT.

"In this retreat I was again brought to desire that God should avenge at my cost all the wrongs done to Him. I would have desired to see all creatures leagued against me; but instead of vengeance, I was sensible of so much grace that its unction extended even to my body. I asked God to impart His favours to our Sisters in this retreat. His interior voice said to me, 'All have it not in the same measure, because all do not act always from pure love, and labour not with equal fidelity to acquire the perfection of this love and of the interior spirit, which is the soul of thy Order, since thou art a daughter of the Heart of my Son, thy Spouse Jesus.' I conceived such a violent desire not to fail of the perfection of this pure love, that I would have made a particular vow of it, but I was not allowed to do so; and, besides, Love assured me that such vow was contained in my secret ones, and even in that of chastity, if I observe to the letter, as I try to do, the constitution of this vow.

"EIGHTH RETREAT.

"I learnt my lesson from the Incarnate Word; to wit, that the great secret of perfection lies, as our holy Founder says, in bearing one's cross, in doing much, in suffering much, and in loving much. I instantly consecrated myself afresh as a victim of the divine justice surrounded with mercy, and as a pure holocaust to His love. I gave myself up to my great God for the salvation of the nations, and I was consoled at

seeing this salvation in His Hands. I even offered to sacrifice my Isaac, that is to say, this abundance of favours which Thou impartest to Thy servant Bénigne, O my God ; but so far from cutting them off, He lifted me up to a new elevation of spirit, and I received a profusion of these same favours.

“In this retreat our Mother recommended me to be sparing of my words. I will not fail to be so, by God’s help, even should I have to fail in what our venerable Mother de Chantal told me, never to refuse to speak to our Sisters when they wish it, because I think there is most humility in submission to present and positive obedience.

“NINTH RETREAT.

“In this retreat, one morning, on going into the refectory, I saw the Crucifix, which is painted above the table of the Superior, all beautiful and shining. This caused in my soul a profound sorrow for the least failings of my life, and made me think that I went into retreat to bear the cross there. I saw all the crosses which awaited me : those of vocation, of condition, of election, of communication, of impetration, of obligation ; those brought on by creatures, those caused by evil spirits ; spiritual, temporal, corporal ones ; those of spirit and of heart. It seemed to me impossible to bear so many, and the burden of them appeared so heavy, that I thought the strength of a giant would have given way under them ; but as love takes no excuse, as my particular duty is to honour God

by the cross, and as it was a just sentence, from which there was no appeal, I gave myself up to it without reserve, without consideration; and I even resolved not to yield to the divine sweetness, except so far as love would have me, and to feel only its severities, if He so ordained. And thus, all in confusion for my past cowardice, in a transport of love I took my burden on my shoulders, determined never to lay it down. Jesus pierced my heart with a dart of love by these interior words: 'Bénigne, ask of me the salvation of my people, ask me to pardon them; employ thus the whole of these ten days; leave nothing unsuffered to oblige me to show mercy to the world; renew for that end all thy ardours and thy pleasures of suffering.' (It was her severe penances that He thus designated, and He asked her for great and new ones; she obeyed, and went through some prodigious ones, love not allowing her the least alleviations.) Once when I sighed, the word *alas!* escaped me. Love said to me, 'What! is Bénigne weary already? will this lover of Jesus do what her Spouse has not done? will she come down from her cross? Ah! Bénigne, Love will not allow this.' 'Oh no,' I answered, 'Lord, Thou knowest well that there is nothing that I will not do and suffer to obey Thee, and for the interest of my neighbour. Love, suffering, suffering.' . . .

"Then I learnt the advantage of loving suffering. I learnt that the crosses of election help us to carry those of vocation; that those of impetration and participation in the sorrows of Jesus, are the most pain-

ful, but at the same time the most meritorious; that those which are caused and imposed by obedience are the most useful; and that those which Providence permits are to be carried most lovingly, as being the most precious.

“TENTH RETREAT.

“On the first day at mass, at the priest’s *Confiteor*, I was subjected to a certain operation of grace by which I was shown, I believe by an intellectual vision, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who was laying Himself before His Father, with an incomparable majesty, for the work of our redemption. He seemed to me to be especially laden with the languors of His Bénigne, but with so much love that this sight made me fall as into a swoon, in which I remained several hours occupied with these few words: ‘Bénigne is tenderly loved by a loving God.’

“When I came to myself I took the time to say the Litanies of the Saints (for such is my custom, as far as I can, in my retreats). When I came to the petition for Christian princes, I remembered those for whom I had made sacrifices, upon which Love gave me to hear incomprehensible secrets, while I was, as it were, under a press, my body being all crushed with sufferings, and my spirit raised into a sublime light.

“ELEVENTH RETREAT.

“I represented to my soul the need which it had of knowing what it is, what it is doing, and what it is

expecting ; but from the first days Love took possession of me, and withdrew me, as it were, into a delicious solitude, and there I received this single lesson : ‘ Refuse God nothing, and take all He will give thee, never forgetting thy own nothingness.’

“ TWELFTH RETREAT.

“ I entered into this retreat only to give myself up to love, and in the first Mass which I heard, at those words of the *Credo: et homo factus est*, I received so much light on the love of the Incarnate Word, that I was almost lost in God. I saw around me as it were a Sun, whose divine ray penetrated my inmost soul. The next day Love Himself made me see and know the beauty and perfection of my vocation, and the happy necessity it brings of living in the presence of God, in the divine union, and in that of our Sisters. Then I said heartily: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum*, &c., thanking our Lord for having placed me in so holy a society, where life is so peaceful, and for the grace He has done me in making me sensible of the darts of His love.

“ THIRTEENTH RETREAT.

“ The first day, being at table, and feeling greatly excited to contrition for my faults, I was wounded with a new dart of love which obliged me to go out, and without knowing what I did, I went before the Most Holy Sacrament. There God took possession of all the powers of my soul and commanded

me to drink deeply of His favour, and to commit it to writing ; but I have never been able to express what He did in me, except that He left me a sublime capacity of knowing the gift of God, and somewhat of His most intimate perfections. I learnt marvellous secrets about the magnanimity which God desires of our soul, even not to be frightened at our faults. One of those days, at the Communion, I heard these words in the depth of my heart : ‘ Bénigne, I take pleasure in thee ;’ words which plunged my soul in an ocean of comfort and love.

“ FOURTEENTH RETREAT.

“ In this retreat, Father John Baptist Baratte, of the Society of Jesus, obliged me to consult about my interior states Father Bertolotti, of the same Society. He began by finding great fault with me, and ordered me to apply myself only to meditating on the four ends of man, to detesting my sins, and in my recollections to say only the *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Credo*, suppressing all sentiments of love. All this appeared to me to be above my strength ; nevertheless I obeyed him exactly, and if I had not done so, I should have thought myself lost. I began to meditate on my sins, but I saw again our Lord Jesus Christ ready to pardon them, and offering Himself to His Father in satisfaction for them. When I thought of death I entered into excesses of love and joy, for I saw that by it I should obtain a greater liberty and capacity of loving God perfectly.

“When I thought of the last judgment I saw my Judge, my Lover, calling me by every tender name, and His justice seemed to me so beautiful and acceptable that I gave myself up to it again, and besought Him not to spare me in my severest sufferings, such as the sight of the evil spirits and of the ills which they try to do me, if that were more pleasing to God.

“When I gave an account of this to the above-named Father, he told me they were diabolical stories, and bade me detest them and turn away from them still more faithfully. My resistance was too weak a dyke not to be destroyed and swept away by the torrent of the infinite mercies which inundated my poor soul; nothing could draw me off from God, neither work, nor occupation, nor even the most severe penances: and this gave occasion to the good Father to tell me that without doubt I was beset with evil spirits, that I thought far too well of myself, that I was only a proud and audacious nothing: all which put me into such terrible fears, that the ordinary confessor took pity on me; he knew, besides, my great sufferings, and thought that a trouble of this kind might make me give way altogether: so he bade me take heart and encouraged me to bear this guidance as a proof of my love.

“The Sisters, who knew the very bottom of my soul, appeared then to be ignorant of all this, and therefore I thought that I was regarded as lost: some few, however, told me not to be cast down, that what is of God cannot be changed or destroyed.

“My consolation was in silence, and when I would

have comforted myself with a little reading, Jesus corrected me, saying : ' I will be thy sole support.'

" I was apprehensive of too great confidence in the divine mercies, and, to fill up my suffering, I dared not listen to the interior voice : once, however, its operation was so mighty, that I cried out in a transport of love : ' Lord take all and leave me but the desire to love thee eternally.' A terrible trouble came upon me, that of exposing to censure the persons who had ordered me to write up to this time. I went and made it known to this good father, who confirmed me in this obedience, appointing for me the exact time which I was to spend in it. This zealous director gave me very good advice, and very solid, as I found.

" In this retreat I learnt that there is in God a fulness of treasures which loves to pour itself into the abyss of our abasement. Also it was said to me : ' Bénigne shall enjoy me in this life, and everything else shall be bitterness to her. Jesus, Saviour of the world, wills that Bénigne should be re-established in her first peace. Jesus, Saviour of souls, wills that Bénigne should be protected by His Holy Mother, even in her death.' I went out of this retreat with great dispositions for pure and perfect love."

We must add that the proof to which this good father put our dear Bénigne was procured for her by our late honoured Sister of St. Innocent, her dear companion in her noviciate, and by some other sisters who were very desirous that we should make sure of the abundance of graces she was receiving, which could

not always be so hidden as not to be sometimes apparent to the eyes of all, with a view of one day publishing them. Afterwards we made her speak to her worthy Father Baratte, who reassured her as to her way, and said that, doubtless, God willed one day to exalt the glory of His love, by publishing to all, the Divine mercies which Sister Bénigne received.

“ FIFTEENTH RETREAT.

“ Many weeks before entering into it, I had a merciful foretaste of the sweetness which I should enjoy in being there alone with my Spouse, as I found weariness in everything which kept me from Him. The service of a family of nearly eighty persons required continual attention, and if, by staying a little while with God, I caused the least trouble to my neighbour, I felt extreme pain for it, and cried afterwards in His divine ear : ‘ Pardon, Lord, grace, mercy !’

“ One evening when I was making the portions of the sisters who were at supper, a book was being read which spoke of divine love, and I was obliged by a secret impulse to give it my attention. I remained there, laid hold of by the divine operation, and so absorbed in God that my will was unable to resist; the words of the commemoration which I had heard sung at Vespers (it was the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost) *confide filia*, were repeated to me, as well as this word of the oratio, *Absolve*. Methinks, I received a general absolution for all my faults; I asked for one for the people also. This grace was so evident to the Sisters that when I

came to myself I let them believe I was ill, that they might speak to me no more about it: the suspension of my spirit in God lasted all night and all the next day.

“ Thus hungering after God I entered into retreat, giving myself up at once to the Divine Spirit, and the first word then said to me was: ‘ Know thyself.’ Upon this all my interior was placed before my eyes with great clearness, as well the evil which is mine, as the good which is from God.

“ About an hour after midnight all the sweetness and all the light ceased, and I remained as in the centre of the blackest darkness, and beheld myself as before the throne of divine justice, without enjoying the light of the Sovereign Judge, nor that of my Angels, treated with great severity, but a just and holy severity. Then it was said to me, ‘ this state is given thee to represent to thee the cessation of grace in a soul, and the judgment of punishment which will be passed upon it, if it dies thus without recovering that grace by loving penance.

“ O God, how great its misery appeared to me, and how true a misery it is, how horrible; a soul deprived of grace! a soul condemned by a holy justice to an eternal separation from God. My pain was intolerable, I was as if dead with grief. I had a great insight given me into what is in such case the terror of a soul which, deprived of love, sees itself a prey to all evils, and seized by the enemies of that Immortal Judge.

“ I was three hours in this terrible anxiety of spirit. Our Lord has never again since that time permitted me fully to figure to myself that terrible state, in order to save me from a mortal pain. I said over and over again, what must this separation of the soul from its God be, if the mere representation of it kills one ! Oh ! how piercing and sorrowful it is ! A soul condemned never to see God, never to love him ! At this instant I should have been reduced to my first nothingness, if a fire of love had not sustained me. At last a kind of curtain was drawn ; I saw my Judge assisted by Angels, surrounded with glory, and again it was said to me with ravishing love : ‘ *Confide filia*, and ‘ *absolve*.’ My two Angels led me to our cell. I passed the remainder of this retreat in the enjoyment of the sublimest, rarest, and most exquisite favours, not knowing if I were in heaven, or if heaven had come down into my soul.

“ It was in this retreat that God made known to me that my death would take place in the twenty-third week after Pentecost.

“ During these ten days I renewed all my acts of abandonment, for the salvation of my neighbour. Ah ! what would not my heart do to preserve all souls in the grace of my God.

“ SIXTEENTH RETREAT.

“ I entered into solitude inconsiderately, without any other disposition than an extreme desire to enjoy God therein. I remained at first, four hours together

elevated in Him, and in the morning the Spouse called me into His presence by the most tender names. I wished to enter into the view of my misery, but Love said to me: 'What! Bénigne still wishes to act by herself; when shall I come to the end of her distrust and straitened sentiments?'

"One day I abstained from Holy Communion on my authority, in punishment of certain faults. The Spouse rebuked me for it; but in terms of love. I became weary of seeking, drop by drop, by meditation and reading, what I found in God in torrents, for He treated me with a magnificence worthy of Himself. Ah! who but Jesus can content the heart! Who can say what it is to see Jesus! to hear Jesus speak! to receive His grace, to taste His sweetness, to feel the ardour of His love, in a word, to enjoy Jesus!"

On coming out of this repose, she asked for some new occasion of suffering. God heard her prayer, and permitted that a girl employed in the house should break out into abuse of her and even deal her severe blows, calling her a hypocrite and possessed of the devil. To this trial there was added an increase of great and painful bodily infirmities, especially a monstrous swelling of the head, the mere sight of which moved to pity; she asked our Lord what would accrue to His Divine Majesty from this suffering; the interior word made answer: "If thou writest it as I bid thee, they will bless me for having given thee so much strength to endure it for my love." Afterwards our Lord confirmed the command to write,

and there took place a kind of dialogue between Him and His Bénigne. "Alas!" she said, "what wilt Thou gain by these writings, O Lord?" "My glory will be exalted by them." "O God! Nothingness exalt the All! How can that be?" "By showing how I love this nothing," Jesus replied. "But to what purpose should they learn what thou hast done for me?" "They will be excited to love me by reading it." "Ah! Lord, my little virtue will not correspond to Thy bounties, they will never believe them!" "He who will not believe shall not taste them." "Ah! my God, who will be able to collect Thy divine favours out of my rough copies? What person will take so much trouble?" "I will find her, Bénigne, trust to my care, and I will reward those who shall read the recital of the graces which I have been pleased to heap upon thy soul."

She said again to her Jesus: "Faith does not oblige any one to believe these divine favours." But He taught her that the heart which loves perfectly hopes strongly, believes its Lover easily, and will possess even in this life all it can desire from His bounty.

She adds: "After this I wrote easily, and always under the protection of the holy Mother of God, and with the single view of obeying and glorifying His Divine Majesty. She told me that she knew clearly from this dialogue that I was the person appointed to do this work."

" SEVENTEENTH RETREAT.

" This solitude was to me a continual profusion of graces and love on the part of my Well-beloved. I suffered a little at the sight of the pains which I had to endure at the end of my life, Jesus having told me that in my agony I should not only be on the cross but should die upon it as He did. He again promised me the assistance of the most Holy Virgin, and added : ' At the hour of thy death I will go to thee ; Bénigne, my chosen one, I will occupy thee with my love. Even to her last end the spouse must be conformable to her Spouse.'

" In this retreat I experienced a certain inability to act, and was like a swathed child who cannot stir ; but my calmness seemed to me perfect, and the action of my love tender, gentle, peaceful, and without intermission.

" EIGHTEENTH RETREAT.

" In this I was occupied by the Three Divine Persons, solitary in myself in their ineffable unity ; engaged in a single action, nothing being able to interrupt their single and simple repose ; possessing all goods in themselves, happy in their own happiness.

" Jesus banished from me all sensible pleasure, and informed me that from that same instant I should henceforth enjoy, by the most sublime of graces, the interior intimate presence of these Three Sacred Persons, and it seemed to me that they were operating and acting in my soul in a divinely merciful way ; I conceived by an intellectual glance adorable truths.

"I saw myself in Jesus as in my looking-glass, contemplating myself in order to form myself upon Him, and to copy Him in myself. In this state I cried out, 'O nothingness! O sin! Begone from me and hinder me no more from union with my God. Oh! grace of my God be propitious to Bénigne. I have said already that dust cannot rise towards heaven but by the help of the wind; and my nothingness cannot rise to its Sovereign Good but by thy impulse.

"O fair grace! O sweet Love of my First Cause!

"NINETEENTH RETREAT.

"I was led, I believe, as by the hand of Love, and I saw the great All present to the all little. I cannot express what this Sovereign Greatness imprinted and diffused, especially by Holy Communion, in His vile Bénigne. It is an abyss which came to lose itself in another abyss. Yes, an abyss of power, of strength, of goodness, of liberality, of light, of mercy, of love came and poured itself as it were into the heart of her who is only an abyss of nothingness and of sin.

"Supreme Greatness humbled Itself; power imparted itself to impotence; infinite love communicated itself, gave itself and lifted up littleness, weakness, nothingness, to the Sovereign All. Oh! superabounding grace, who could express it? Bénigne is incapable of doing so!

"TWENTIETH RETREAT.

"On the 11th of October, 1680, being an appointed fast because it was Friday, from four o'clock in the

morning till eleven, I was before the Blessed Sacrament, occupied with God in a way most marvellous and mercifully infinite, by incomparable excesses of love. God took possession of all the powers of my soul which He raised to Himself by grace and love, and I was obliged to say to Him: 'What, Lord! dost Thou indeed remember what Thou art and what I am? Thou art the All, and I am only nothingness.' Then this Infinite Love added graces upon graces, mercies upon mercies, gifts upon gifts, and continued during the remainder of this retreat to pour upon me incomprehensible favours."

Let us end with the profit which she drew from these delicious solitudes, and with the dispositions in which she came forth from them. "The last day of my retreats," she says, "I am often occupied with the fruits which I ought to draw and reap from them, and I offer these to God as a present of love; and often after He has held them, as if in His hand, to look at them, He gives them back to me that I may feed on them, disposing of them myself at the will of His love. Ordinarily I go out of my retreats with a fresh desire to leave and empty myself of myself, that I may the better contain Jesus and the height of His love; with a new ardour of always seeking Him by a deeper love, taking care that all I think, say, do, and suffer may be thought, said, done, and suffered for God alone, through love, and to exalt His glory.

"My particular resolutions most frequently are; to have but one end in view—to love, glorify, and please

God ; to redouble every instant my gratitude to Him, praising Him, thanking Him, and magnifying Him for His infinite mercies ; to endeavour to make my preparations for receiving the divine Sacraments so attentive, so faithful, so loving, that I may thereby approach them as little unworthily as possible.

“ I will love and observe faithfully our holy Rules, Constitutions, and customs ; I will obey them with submission and with a love full of tenderness, accounting nothing to be little. My Jesus has told me more than once, in loving terms, that the highest perfection is contained in our holy Rules.

In my troubles I will remember the words which our Lord speaks by a prophet, *‘ As for me, I have been brought up in hardships and in labours from my youth. ’* The love of God is well worth suffering to acquire it ; it is well worth suffering and keeping silence ; avoiding the shadow of evil, neglecting not even the least good. But since I can do nothing by myself, I place all my hope in God ; I often ask help from Jesus Christ, from the Holy Virgin, the Angels, the Saints, and especially from my blessed Founder and my venerable Foundress.”

In her retreats, as elsewhere, our Bénigne avoided all singularity, even always keeping the little half-hour for recreation. It is true she was there as if without words, but with so much affability that while she kept silence she said a thousand things by her gentle modesty and her holy recollection. She drew the

tickets, and kept them carefully ; the spiritual songs, too, pleased her much ; they were, it may be said, her love and her delight ; but where did this chosen soul not find these, she who was swimming, so to speak, in continual foretastes of eternal bliss ?

END OF THE SECOND PART.

PART III.

INTRODUCTION.



HAVE described the beginnings of the religious life of our dear Sister Jeanne Bénigne, and the benedictions bestowed by our Lord upon all her household employments ; I have spoken of the graces and instructions given her by His Majesty, and the virtues for which she was most conspicuous. In the Second Part of this work I have tried to express the ways by which Divine Love was pleased to lead this chosen soul, and the different states through which He made her pass. But what shall I say in this Third Part of the marvellous fragments of those splendid gifts, of those separate graces without number and without order, with which Thou, O Lord, didst load her in such profusion that she herself said that she knew not how to recount them all, but that they would have amply sufficed to fill and to captivate a hundred hearts ?

“No, my God,” she wrote, “there is no year which has not been truly a year of benedictions to me, no day in each year that I may not call a day of grace, and not even an hour of the days I have passed in

religion that has not been marked by some signal favour. I will endeavour to recount them faithfully, in obedience to Jesus Christ and to the Superiors He has given me.

“I have received them from the most Holy Trinity; from the Father, from the Son, from the Holy Ghost, from our good Mother Mary, from St. Joseph, from my Angels, from my blessed Founders and other Saints; on Sundays and week-days, in my retreats, in my Communions; for the Church militant, for the Church suffering, for the Institute; in short, for every one, at all times, and in all places. No; there is not a place nor a corner in this dear Monastery which does not repeat to me the favours of my God.

“The garden recalls to my mind the thousand spiritual delights I have enjoyed there, and the marvellous instances of assistance afforded by the providence of God to His poor creature; how often also have not its flowers and fruits spoken to me of the beauty and the graces of my Spouse!

“The choir and all the places near it renew in me the transports I have felt on entering it, not only to enjoy the real presence of my God in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, but to recount to my soul the infinite mercies of His divine liberality. That is the sanctuary into which nothing ever entered that could disturb my memory, for I suffered no distractions there.

“In the refectory I feel myself interiorly recollected in God, in the thought that there my soul was much

better nourished by secret touches and by the holy reading, than my body was by the food. Above all, I cannot approach it at Whitsuntide and on Holy Thursday without a thrill of joy and gratitude, so abundantly has Divine Love bestowed graces on me there.

“But the mercies and the torrents of heavenly favours which my King has poured out upon me in our cells have made me justly call them my paradise, since there I possess my God, and enjoy Him in the most tranquil repose.

“The community-room also, from whence I have so often passed from the holy society of my Sisters to that of the Angels, is to me a royal chamber, into which I enter respectfully, recalling to mind the graces received in taking the lights to the Sisters, in making the fire and distributing it, preparing their seats, and especially that of our Mother, who so well represents to me my God. Everything, in short, yes, everything, reminds Bénigne of the benefactions of her Beloved.”

I add nothing to the tender expressions of this soul so full of gratitude and so penetrated with the gifts of God, and I shall also take chiefly from her own notes the details reserved for this Third Part.

CHAPTER I.

THE PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE WHICH THE HUMBLE SISTER
JEANNE BÉNIGNE HAD OF GOD AND OF HIS DIVINE ATTRI-
BUTES.

THE name alone of God," said our pious Bénigne, "creates in me an excess of love and respect, and a fulness of grace which plunges me into an abyss of confusion." She often had a pure and simple sight of the perfections of God. "But," she added, "I do not enter into that sublime knowledge, unless I am guided to it by Love Himself. The attributes which touch my soul most deeply, and which most excite my love and admiration, are His grandeur, His power, His justice, His goodness, and His holiness; my chief attraction is, however, to His beautiful justice, which He always shows me surrounded by His sweet mercy. I feel for it a love that is beyond all expression; I have several times given myself up, consecrated, and immolated myself to it by a total abandonment. My God has deigned to accept this act, and He has made known to me that it will be seen, known, and praised at the great day of judgment. Ah! I am too happy if I can, by enduring its severity, exalt it, glorify it, and satisfy it for the outrages committed against God. This is the office of Jesus Christ, and it is this participation in His graces which I most desire. Jesus was in the sight of His Father an adorable and holy Object, pure, and all love; but He willed to be espe-

cially the Object of His justice, and the only one upon which it has been infinitely exercised, as He is the only one infinitely punished for us."

She rejoiced exceedingly at seeing the Saviour infinitely recompensed by the same Sovereign Justice, and by it established Judge and absolute Monarch of all creatures, bearing that name above all other names. But she took pleasure in this remunerating justice only when it was exercised in favour of Jesus Christ. For herself, all her hope and desire was to suffer as a humble member of Jesus. "Oh!" she says in one of her notes, "if people knew His attractions as I have the happiness of knowing them, they would love the justice of God as much as His goodness; that is to say, they would receive His punishments as willingly as His rewards, for they are always adorable, always mingled with secret mercies. Oh! can one indeed love a God supremely good, and not have an insatiable desire to be united to His only Son, infinitely punished for our offences?"

The very name of sin which offends that beautiful justice, made her not only tremble, but seem almost ready to die. O God! and this deformed monster is the only obstacle to the operations of Thy grace! what a pity that souls should by this horrible evil resist a God of infinite power! She could not restrain her tears and sobs at this thought; her whole desire, her passion, was to see this accursed sin destroyed, the sinner converted, her good God loved and His glory exalted.

Once she asked of God the life of a Prince, which

was granted her, accompanied by a deluge of blessings ; but these words penetrated her soul : “ ‘ But Bénigne, that little innocent one will, perhaps, become a sinner ; ’ then all my joy,” she said, “ was changed into most bitter bitterness ; I no longer looked upon this favour with the same pleasure, and the thought that the innocence of my little Prince might one day be lost through his sins, overwhelmed me with grief.” She hesitated a little whether she ought to thank God for having granted her the preservation of that life ; she did so however, and then felt herself consoled, as she did every time she made petitions for him. I cannot describe what she had to suffer afterwards on his account, to satisfy the justice of God at her own expense. What would she not have done in order that he might not commit a single sin, or that she might obtain for him from God the grace to do a good action ! But her zeal extended to all because Jesus died for all men.

She felt a wonderful respect for everything that had life, as an emanation from the life of God Himself. “ I have often wept,” she said, “ on seeing the trees were dead from which I had gathered so much and such fine fruit. Alas ! they reminded me of a soul dead through sin, after having been enriched with the gifts of God, and deprived by its own fault of living His divine life.”

She very often said it was impossible for us to comprehend how the Providence of God is gently, carefully, and lovingly occupied and employed in favour of certain

hearts which abandon themselves to His adorable care ; it had been clearly shown to her that God Himself aids with His especial divine assistance the soul that perfectly confides in Him ; that it was following the Will of God as He wished, to adore it in all the events of life, and especially to love it in His divine commands, in our rules, in obedience to Superiors, and even in the just desires of our Sisters ; that by love and abandonment the soul loses itself in God more easily than a drop of water loses itself in the sea ; but God Himself assured her that no one could understand how this came to pass.

She saw that all these graces obliged her to do a great deal for God, to obey Him, to glorify Him, and to love Him more and more. " Their abundance," she said, " while it fills me, makes my natural being withdraw, and, as it were, annihilates it, so as to give place wholly to God whom I feel more in me than myself." God often made known to this humble Sister the notable difference between acquired and infused virtues ; how the first are preserved as they are acquired, by acts and by practice, and the second by the pure love with which the heart loves God simply and sincerely.

" I think myself blessed even in this life," she often exclaimed, " in my assurance that God is the Object of my beatitude ; oh ! the sweetness of this thought is enough to raise to God hearts of steel. . . . My soul will enjoy God during eternity, for His mercy and love give me this hope ! O my soul, be as good as

thou art happy, since God renders thee by His grace capable of receiving in thyself the proofs of His love and goodness."

She often implored her Divine Spouse to render her perfect, pleasing to His love and wholly His ; on this she was assured that nothing can hurt a soul in which God works by the illumination of His grace ; that the heavenly unction makes God present to the soul, that He heats it with His love and dispels from it all coldness and all vain apprehension. She also learnt that divine truth imprinted in a soul, gives it more knowledge of God than all the creatures on earth or the reading of all the books in the world.

"God is occupied with Himself," she wrote, "He knows Himself by His own knowledge, He loves Himself with His own love ; He teaches me that a religious soul ought by His grace to do the same ; to see Him, to know Him, and to love Him in her heart. The act of pure love of God requires a pure elevation of our mind to where God is alone, where there are no more imaginary species nor multiform intelligence, but God alone. I know that to love God is to give one's mind to seeing that all is nothing that is not done for Him, for His glory and for His love ; and that in order to live for God, it is necessary to die to ourselves ; for the true life comes to us only by that mystical death which glorifies God by annihilating us in Him."

I end this chapter by adding that whenever God was not spoken of, Bénigne withdrew and shut herself up within herself, with sweet modesty and such profound

recollection that one would have thought she had been rapt out of her senses ; but the mere mention of His adorable Name instantly brought her back, and it was a real delight to hear her speak of the sweetness of divine love and its operations in us.

CHAPTER II.

GRACES RECEIVED FROM THE MOST HOLY TRINITY—HER
DEVOTION TO THE THREE AUGUST PERSONS.



HER devotion to the honour of the most adorable Trinity was beyond all that we can say ; she herself speaks of it in these terms : “ It pleased God to give me from the moment of my entrance into religion a special love for the most Holy Trinity, and a great care to honour and reverence It, by which I got the habit of doing everything in Its name. I loved to see that in our ceremonies in choir we made a genuflection to the Blessed Sacrament, an inclination to the tomb of our holy Founder (as we do here to his picture), and another to the Superior, and that by this means I could follow my desire to do everything by the number three, as well as in my aspirations, invocations, practices of virtue, acts of love, faith, hope, contrition, and especially of praise. I was delighted to learn that I should consecrate myself by my three vows to those three Divine Persons, and it was in order more completely to immolate myself to Them, that I afterwards vowed the three powers of my

soul (which represent them in me) to the divine good pleasure. The eagerness I felt to show my love, reverence, and gratitude to the adorable Trinity, led me to desire that the whole world should confess It, adore It, and love It. I earnestly wished that the prayers in honour of It should be recited with interior devotion, and I felt an increase of submission, reverence, and love whenever I heard the *Gloria Patri* said; it was also a delight to me that all the prayers, hymns, and psalms ended with the holy names of the Three Divine Persons."

She told me that the Seraphim had taught her this tender devotion by their divine Trisagion, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, and that the adorable Trinity Itself had taught her to invoke It, imploring its power, wisdom, and pure love; to honour It, distrusting herself and confiding in It; and to carry her love of God to the highest perfection, by strong and vehement desire. Another time the Three Divine Persons gave her these lessons: "Bénigne must do everything in the spirit of Jesus, and must follow Him in all things, to glorify us in Him and by Him.

"Bénigne must do nothing but for the glory of God and the good of her neighbour, for which she shall lavish her life, her consolation, and her most sacred interests.

"Bénigne must love God at all times; she must be ruled, led, and governed by love, and by love alone." By an ineffable grace she one day knew that her soul was destined by that august Trinity to receive the

merciful extent of the divine perfection, in order that the impression of Its grace might be more deeply engraven on her soul, in which by Its wisdom and infinite goodness It was preparing Its abode ; that It touched and wounded her heart through love, to oblige her in return to love It perfectly and with inviolable fidelity ; thus she knew that when God wounded her with love of Him, the Heart of God let itself be touched and inclined towards her in love.

Once, on a day appointed by the Church for the veneration of the Three Holy Persons in their unity, she was made to understand, by a deep interior grace, that her body was their temple, her mind their throne, and her heart the place of their delight. " O Love," she said, " how great was that mercy of God ! Grant, O Lord, that Thy Benigne may never separate herself from Thee ; that my heart may be always united to the Heart of my Jesus, my soul to His soul, and that my mind may never act but by His orders and impulse. So be it."

" On another of those glorious days," she said, " being unusually penetrated with sorrow for my sins, which I discerned by an interior sight enlightened by love, I was placed at the foot of the throne of the infinite Majesty of God ; and there, as I wept and lamented in profound peace, like Magdalen at the feet of Jesus, I was made to hear these words spoken in the ear of my heart : *Remittuntur peccata tua*. Ah ! how often have these same words of peace and mercy been repeated to me, especially on the day when the

Gospel is read at Mass which announces to us this mecriful remission of our sins, and the power of remitting them, given by Jesus to His Church. On the same day I have often had renewed the grace of that consuming heat which I feel in the region of my heart, where that great globe of the fire of love entered, as has been related elsewhere."

It was in receiving these excesses of mercy from the august Trinity, that she was heard to exclaim, "Oh! my soul; oh! my heart; oh! all that has had the honour to be formed by the Hand of God, confess His name, His adorable goodness, His marvellous greatness; confess, above all, His mercies towards the most unworthy of His creatures; and, in short, confess that the happiness to be found in Him and in the treasures of His love, outweighs all the joys of the world, and even those which man might have had in a state of innocence. God alone is the only happiness of the soul, and He alone can satisfy it, being the only object that is sufficient for it.

"One day the interior voice said to me: 'God renders the blessed like Himself; yes, Bénigne, my elect by seeing me are in such wise transformed in me that they have no other will than mine; their love springs from my love. Ah! what is wanting to the grace I bestow on thee in showing myself to thee, except duration, to be able to call thyself blessed.'

"One Sunday in October I received in Holy Communion one of those plenitudes of grace which gave me the assurance of the presence of the Divine Trinity in

my heart. The effects of this mercy were marvellous; the powers of my soul were perfected by it, and His truth and love inflamed my heart with love. Again, how often have I had elevations of mind and vehement raptures on hearing those words : God of God, Light of light.

“The knowledge they convey to me is interior, and the love they produce is all pure ; all is spiritual, all that is human withdraws itself ; it is no longer a light, it is no longer a word, a sight, an operation, an impression, it is something above all those ; it is, as I think, an Infinite Majesty filling a great vacancy, an immense All uniting itself to a nothing, which it attracts and raises to itself. During this ecstasy I have sometimes seen more clearly than with the eyes of faith, that glory which fills heaven and earth.

“One day God the Father, penetrating me with a divine touch, spoke thus to His unworthy creature : ‘ My daughter, make manifest my Son by writing down the graces received from Us ; thou couldst not glorify Us better than by so obeying the law of love which has been given thee.’ ”

CHAPTER III.

THE INSTRUCTIONS, LIGHTS, AND PARTICULAR GRACES SHE
RECEIVED FROM THE ETERNAL FATHER.

E shall see here how the Father of lights honoured His servant, the humble Bénigne, with the glorious name of daughter, which He was pleased often to give her.

As children bear the surnames of their fathers and are endowed with their qualities, so this daughter of the Most Holy, of the Eternal Father whose essence is holiness, aimed from her childhood, at nothing but holiness.

These words alone, Holy God, captivated her heart and gave her the most ardent desire to conform herself to Him. Her heavenly Father Himself led her into the ways of holiness, saying to her many times: "My daughter, Bénigne, thou must follow my Son, thy steps must reach to His steps, thy pains to His by participation, thy love must attain to that of the Seraphim, and even surpass it, that it may approach that of the Heart of Jesus; by this, my daughter, I point out to thee the height of the perfection I require.

"My daughter," He also said to her, "when thou raisest thyself to me, thy Beginning, humble thyself, and then be sure of my assistance. The beatitude of the soul consists in knowledge and supreme love of the Divinity; by this love I will render thee holy.

“ My daughter, consider well the dignity of thy soul, which comes from me, and my grace which enters into it to give it form, and to make it acquire the capacity of being made blessed.

“ My daughter, I am thy origin and thy life ; as the sun shows itself by its rays, I discover myself to thee as thy Father, by the lights of my grace which thou receivest so abundantly. By letting thee enjoy the sight of me and the fulness of my sweetness, I reward thy faith, I increase thy love, I testify mine to thee ; and by my divine favours thy charity is in some degree recompensed in this mortal life.

“ Know, my daughter, that by the single act of love thou believest and hopest, and that in the possession of my divine favour, thou possessest every good that can be believed, hoped for, and loved.”

Another time her heavenly Father gave her this lesson : “ The soul alone that is crucified with my Son by grace, by love and by pure suffering, attracts my eyes and my heart, as the only one that is disposed to receive my divine mercies.”

The designs of her Father with regard to her were made known to her ; they were that she should imitate His only Son our Lord Jesus Christ in pains, sorrows, and contradictions, which she would not be spared. “ Yes,” He said to her, “ my daughter will suffer unceasingly ; but the more she suffers, the more she will glorify me ; the more I augment her graces, the more will my Will incline towards hers, and the more I will do what she desires for herself and for others.” The

sweetness of this divine discourse may well induce us to say that in her were exemplified the words of the Holy Spirit, that God would take her into His bosom to caress her, and we may repeat that the life of Sister Jeanne Bénigne may justly bear the title of "The charms of Divine Love."

This most benignant Father also said to her once : " My daughter, what can afflict thee ? What do I not do for thee ? I keep thee in my Bosom, thou hast been brought there with my Son, thou art my friend, I stoop down to thee, I fill thee with my graces, I give thee no reason to think that I omit to confer a single one upon thee." " What confusion did these words cause me," said Bénigne, " knowing especially that His Divine Eye penetrated to the bottom of my nothingness ; but confusion gives way to love."

The Eternal Father glories in being called a hidden God, an unknown God ; and we may believe that He willed to make it also the glory of His daughter, of His humble servant, Bénigne. She loved to be hidden and unknown, and even rejoiced that her graces, or at least the prodigious number of them, were in a measure concealed by some slight defects.

" I keep myself," she said, with inexpressible complacency, " hidden and retired with my heavenly Father, and I like to be unknown because He will never be entirely known."

Once the interior voice said to her : " Daughter, desire my grace and my love, wait in peace for the first, ardently desire the second, and suffer anything

in order to remain unknown." She answered : " Have I then obtained grace ?" The voice of the Heavenly Father replied : " Yes, my daughter Bénigne shall be sanctified by hidden means, by purity of heart, by true innocence. I will unite all my gifts in her by a secret operation of my charity. The beauty of the King's daughter is within ; apparent perfection is only a mark which disfigures my true image ; submission to my divine good pleasure is what is most pleasing in my sight ; who can comprehend the pleasure I take in seeing that Bénigne has so often immolated herself to it by her secret vows. The honour thou renderest me by thy love of my divine justice will never be sufficiently prized, any more than thy desire to glorify me and to suffer ; that is all hidden from men, like my divine attributes, which so few people think of. I penetrate with pleasure into the inmost recesses of thy heart, for as I am the Beginning of all things, I am the end of all thy intentions : Bénigne, my interests are thine, and I make all that regards thee belong to mine ; this is all hidden in God and in Bénigne."

This daughter, thus hidden in her Eternal Father, took courage to complain to Him of His having permitted the Sacred Humanity of her eldest Brother Jesus, to be so ill-treated ; but to console her He raised her to Himself and showed her a specimen of the glory it possesses, saying to her by an interior voice : " See, my daughter, how I have glorified Him ; death has not marred that beautiful Flower of

Nazareth. In the same way that the Resurrection has restored its first divine beauty ; thou, whom I have made His spouse, wilt one day show forth my glory."

Continuing to instruct His dear daughter Bénigne, He taught her that the soul walking in the most sublime paths and by the true way of the Cross, finds its refreshment in pain, the unction of Christ in suffering, its consolation in desolation, and God in its whole being ; that no sooner has one formed a generous design of overcoming self, of loving contempt and the Cross, than God pours into the soul the affluence of His grace.

She learnt that as soon as the soul abandons itself to God as to an all-powerful Father, it is immediately led by Him to those waters of grace which flow from the never-failing source of all good ; that a firm determination to labour vigorously is necessary in order to attain to the high perfection of pure love ; that the want of this generous resolution is the only obstacle to the accomplishment of the most merciful designs of God ; that ingratitude is a monster in a soul that is much favoured by God ; that by the divine union the soul receives food which strengthens and delights it, and which by its sweetness gives it vigour and strength to act and to suffer.

"My daughter Bénigne," the heavenly Father also said to her, "when thou shalt be quite convinced of thine own nothingness and misery, thou wilt learn to magnify my name. I am the Almighty, raising to myself what is but dust ; my mercy is infinite, and I

take pleasure in strikingly displaying it in the sanctification of the chosen souls who abandon themselves with tender confidence to my Providence.

“Remember these lessons, Bénigne, and thou wilt know that I am He who satiates those that hunger after me; that if I speak, I execute; that if thou entirely givest up thy own foresight, I will take care of thee; I take pleasure in working miracles for the hearts that belong to me. She who most completely quits her country and her family will soonest enter into the interior of Jesus Christ, the true promised land. The lights which come immediately from me are the least evident to the senses, and the most disengaged from forms.”

“My Father also taught me,” she writes, “that the memory of intellectual views and lights can be effaced only by certain aridities, when love places the soul, as it were, in a desert solitude; there it thinks it sees nothing, but provided it perseveres faithfully in profiting by the gifts of God, His glory will be exalted by it.

“What His Divine Majesty chiefly requires from our soul is obedience to interior promptings. I know I am not obliged to follow them all; but my correspondence to God ought to pass beyond obligation, so as better to follow the laws of love; therefore I often say to Him, ‘Speak, O Lord, thy daughter and humble servant heareth.’

“The truth of interior words is known by the light they leave in the soul, and by the readiness with which

they are obeyed, although nature sometimes does so with terrible repugnance.

“Oh! sovereign bounty of my heavenly Father, inexhaustible source of all good, how lavish Thou hast been towards Thy poor creature, especially in Thy promise to make me exist eternally in Thee.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE PARTICULAR GRACES SHE RECEIVED
FROM THE DIVINE WORD.



DIVINE WORD, speak; Thou alone canst supply my insufficiency on so sublime a subject; I entreat of Thee this grace by Thy Sacred Heart.

Since the Word in His infinite goodness has raised our nature to Himself, He has acquired absolute dominion over us, and we are His property by purchase, as we were already by creation, because all things were made by Him. He gloried in this dominion especially with regard to this dear soul, often calling her His own.

As all things were made by the Word, He did everything in Bénigne; He found in her His good works, and took tranquil repose in her; by Him she was conducted, directed, animated, pacified, fortified, consoled; His interior words were always operating and efficacious in that faithful soul.

The Word said to her one day, “I not only give

myself to thee, I imprint myself on thee so as to engrave in thee the divine image." She felt Him in her heart, she enjoyed secret intercourse with Him by His interior words. Another time He said to her, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; my way leads thee to the Father, my truth directs and instructs thee, and my life unites thee by love to the Holy Spirit." "Oh, unworthy as I am," she said, "how great was this grace!"

Again the Divine Word said to her, "As my Father is in me, what belongs to me belongs to thee, Bénigne; and if thou wouldst glorify the Father and the Son, believe my words; the loss is theirs who do not believe in me; but my Bénigne will by her faith promote as I direct her the interests of my Father, and will exalt His glory."

"O Prodigy of Goodness," she exclaimed, "who can comprehend or fathom Thee, who can describe Thee? Immense Goodness, Infinite Goodness, but too little known to the human heart, Thou hast too mercifully exercised Thyself on behalf of poor Bénigne of Jesus. O Divine Word, never will Thy Bénigne stray from Thee; how could she do so after having received so many graces, after so many gifts of love! No, I hope to be ever united to Thee by love, to die in love, of love, and for love, and eternally to possess eternal love.

"The eternal Son of the Father wills that I should honour His three births: the first shows me Him incessantly engendered in the bosom of the Father of

Lights; there His birth is divine and perpetual. In the second I see Him conceived in the womb of a pure Virgin by the holy operation of the Divine Spirit. The third is when Jesus Himself and His grace cause this same Word to be born in a soul that He has gained by His death, as by His own power He was born to life immortal by His resurrection. It has pleased His divine goodness to give me great knowledge of these three births of God the Word, especially of the beauty bestowed by the last upon the soul. That soul may, on account of the grace it receives from it, be truly called a soul of grace."

We will conclude with the recital of an incomparable favour conferred by the Word on our dear Jeanne Bénigne, which bears some resemblance to that received by St. John, the beloved of Jesus, and her dear Patron, when he described to us the eternal generation of the Word in those sacred words dictated by the Truth Himself: *In principio erat Verbum*. Yes, we may dare to say that in some small measure the humble Jeanne saw, like the divine eagle, St. John, the Word in God, Light in Light, God in God. She says: "I have learnt such sublime things on this subject, that in very truth I thought I was no longer on the earth. As the Object that occupied me was infinite, all that I saw and received was incomprehensible. I can only say that the mere remembrance of this grace is able to banish all sorts of troubles, and to bring calm to the soul, however violent may be the tempest that agitates it. Alas! it was only for ten months,

I think that I possessed that happiness in a corruptible manner.

"I remember that this grace and that conferred on me by the redemption of the pains of our Lord Jesus Christ are the most sublime that the love of God, availing His goodness, can bestow on it; I do not comprehend them myself and if ever a soul among those who may read this have been favoured with them as I unworthily have been, they will clearly see that I speak the truth. No one need be astonished that such a poor little creature as I am cannot explain myself further in such subjects since the Prophet Isaias and the great Apostles own themselves incapable of it."

CHAPTER V.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GRACES SHE RECEIVED FROM THE HOLY GHOST.

 "O Lord, I pray Thee and guide my pen, that it may describe the graces thou didst bestow on thy Renigan: she herself felt herself unable to do so, for this is what she wrote:—

"I REMEMBER MY JESUS.

"I am unable to describe the state of my soul when it knows the will of Love, when it receives His graces when He makes known to me His will, but Love Himself well knows that He alone can tell what He does in me. I will only say then, O Lord, in love, in thy glory, that thou often sayest to me write as thou art able, my spouse, but know

that thou canst not express the favours I give to thy soul, nor those I bestow on thy heart. I have made it as it were a storehouse of the most precious inventions of my love, I have poured into it the utmost sweetness, and to complete its happiness, that heart is all mine. I suddenly saw it in the divine Hands of that uncreated Love, who held it as if in a very rich vase; I knew that this vase was the Heart of Jesus, and it was said to me, 'Jesus has taken thy heart, but He gives thee His, which contains thine;' then I saw that poor heart of Bénigne so small that I was grieved, thinking it so limited and incapable of holding much love. I desired to be able to take it into my hands to try to stretch it as far as the ends of the earth, and to raise it from earth to heaven, in order that it might be filled with such love as an infinitely amiable Lover deserves. Then Love Himself consoled me for my helplessness, and said to me, 'My dove, I supply all the defects of thy love by my love, its littleness by the love of the Heart of Jesus, its weakness by my all-powerful goodness; in short, the Heart of Jesus and thine, Bénigne, are united.'

"One All Saint's day," I found among her notes, "I felt a great joy which came from my heart, and from the knowledge I received that Divine Love had made Himself absolute master of the hearts of the Saints; that same Love inspired my heart with a vehement desire of being also ruled by it; instantly I felt myself immersed, as a drop of water in an ocean of love; the union was so complete that

it seemed to me as if the whole substance of my body and soul was lost in love, so that I became all love for God ; seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing but an emotion of pure love, but as it were imperceptible, which animated me with a tranquil though very earnest desire that my whole self should be annihilated in love. It was by a miracle of the same Love that my weakness did not succumb and that natural death did not come to my assistance, to convert, unite, and transform me into that eternal Love. Since that happy moment I seem to swim at my ease in a sea of love. Oh ! glorious moments. Oh ! day of profusion !

“ God made known to me that when a soul is thus possessed by love, it produces in her these three effects : The first is to unite the Lover to the beloved, and the beloved to Him. The second is to inspire us with an invincible inclination to give all that is ours and in us to the Object beloved. The third to make us undertake and execute great things for the honour and glory of the Divine Lover.

“ After that, His infinite power requires a complete submission ; His immense greatness a profound adoration ! His ineffable bounty a filial confidence !

“ He taught me that I owe to His Holiness, purity of body, heart and mind ; to His Wisdom, adherence, deference, faith, and submission ; but that to Infinite Love I owe love, and love without limit.

“ Afterwards I learnt that by love everything is

sanctified, according to those words of St. Paul :* ‘ If by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live,’ and receive life, grace, and glory ; that in all we do, God loves only what is done for love, and what serves to increase in us the same pure and holy love.

“ I often find myself in the truth of Love, and that is the attribute I adore, particularly in the Person of the Holy Ghost ; in that depth of essential truth I find a divine calmness, a profound silence, a sweet unction, an interior pleasure far removed from all tepidity, and exempt from dissipation and impurity ; my soul is as if perfumed and liquefied by a divine pouring forth of it into God, where I perceive the light of the truth to be greater than my sight can take in, and I seem to have no need to say, *Emitte lucem tuam*, because a holy impression gives me almost more than I can receive, for I am not only filled but surrounded with it. Oh ! how much I gain by losing myself, when I lose myself in love !

“ The soul possessed by Love aspires only to the honour of being His servant and slave, and to the happiness of augmenting His glory ; she sees with great pleasure that the dimensions of true love are these :—1. To love God disinterestedly in Himself, for Himself, and solely for His love. 2. To wish to attach, and unite ourselves to Him only because it is His desire, His loving design, and His Will, and not

* Romans viii. 13.

in order to find in Him, as we do, our Sovereign Good.

“Once, in a happy moment, my Beloved said to me, ‘Thou dost now possess Love Himself, thou enjoyest Him, and thou wilt see Him as He is produced in the Bosom of the Father;’ then I received blissful knowledge of that infinite production. The contemplation of the infinite love of the Father and the Son for each other was so fixed and so powerful that it made me exclaim, ‘O God ! what is this, who can describe it?’

“This mercy had some relation to that of seeing God the Word in God, but that one lasted ten months, and this did not last long ; the first was not repeated, and this of which I am speaking has been granted me several times with the same fulness of grace, impressing on me reverential and tranquil peace.

“At other times I have received that Divine Spirit as a sacred fire. I have a thousand times beseeched that gentle Love to change my sweet burnings into sharp coldness, in order to satisfy the desire of my soul for incessant suffering, but the interior voice immediately said to me, ‘Jesus came into the world on purpose to bring fire ; He wills that it should burn, and especially in the heart of His Bénigne.’

“This Love teaches me to go to Him without the intermedium of any truths, finding them all in Him ; that the property of that Eternal Truth is to bring into the soul great light and simplicity, with a generous humility ; that the purity of virtue consists in practising it according to the will of Love, and that a

soul that has once tasted God discerns rightly between what is good and what is better, what is perfect and most perfect; whence it comes that its superior part no longer voluntarily receives any, not even the most just and spiritual, desires or pleasures, except so far as God wills; for the property of love is to separate from everything that is sensible.

“This love is a supernatural gift, a fruit of the Saviour’s Blood, a gift of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit of Love. The peace it produces in the soul renders it capable of anything, and makes everything possible to it in Him who sustains it.

“Sometimes it seemed to me that fear was more fitting for my sinful soul. I was corrected for this opposition, and it was said to me explicitly, ‘It is my Will, daughter of love, therefore never approach me but by love and with love.’ Suddenly I felt that all in me was love, and bore the mark of love, which being the bond of perfection, is indissoluble; if I am bound by it to God I shall never be separated from Him. It is the quality of this love to make Him the term of all my desires.”

Once Love said to her: “There should be perfect community between me and my Bénigne; thou shouldst never use these words, ‘I wish,’ or ‘I do not wish,’ but let me act as I please; otherwise, although thou mightest do nothing imperfect, thou wouldst not fail to be guilty, for in the matter of love, want of perfection is a notable fault.”

The Divine Spirit of Love, treating her as His own,

gave her names of affection, calling her His desired one, His chosen, His friend, His dove, His sister, and His spouse. At times He tried her fidelity by hiding Himself for a time, making her seek Him, and returning after she had called Him inexorable, saying, "I wish to see whether thy love will bear any trial." At other times He feigned to refuse her everything, but the result soon convinced her that He had fully granted her prayer.

We will conclude this chapter with some admirable lessons given her by the Divine Teacher :—

"Bénigne must always suffer ; Love commands it, and she must die on the Cross with Jesus Christ her Spouse.

"Bénigne is not to come down from this Cross till after she has expired upon it, like the same Spouse.

"Bénigne must not be surprised to see some faults in herself after receiving so many mercies, and even to feel imperfect emotions, provided she does not dwell on them.

"She must remember that what is unknown to the creature is often best known to the Creator, and that the smallest suffering united to those of Jesus Christ is of greater value than the pleasure she may derive from receiving the affluence of grace.

"Bénigne must live as if God alone and she were alone in the world, and attain to that happy state of no longer trusting in her own knowledge, her feelings, her will, or her power. She must die without dying, live without living, feel joy without rejoicing, taste

things without tasting them ; she must not desire to shine, either by herself or through others, but she must desire that God alone should shine, and that His glory should be exalted.

“ Bénigne must learn that a humble soul rarely falls, because God sustains it by pure love. Love also said to me : ‘ When I conduct the Spouse into thy heart thou shouldst caress Him.’ Bénigne need fear nothing, because Love Himself has given her a place in the Heart of Jesus ; there is her ordinary dwelling-place, where the Spouse bestows upon her His heavenly caresses.”

Another time Love said to her : “ I will assist thee, Bénigne, even to thy end ;” but she was not satisfied with hearing Him speak thus, who will have no end. She complained, and then Love said to her : “ God will be with thee as long as He is God, by an infinite mercy. What canst thou desire from us that thou hast not received ?” This was spoken by the Three Divine Persons in their Unity.

CHAPTER VI.

HER DEVOTION TO THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR—
GRACES RECEIVED IN HER COMMUNIONS—MIRACULOUS
DURATION OF THE SACRED SPECIES.



OUR Sister Jeanne Bénigne often said to me: “Alas! if one wished to write down all the mercies God has bestowed on me in my communions, and made use of the most tender, strong, and loving expressions, and even the most divine ones, know, my Sister, that yet one would not have told what graces I have received therein. I think the pen of a Seraph would not suffice for this miraculous subject, though I have a thousand times fathomed the abyss of grace that is contained in this truth: a creature receives its God! and I have tasted and felt it by faith and love. The Holy Ghost alone can tell the bliss of a soul that really possesses its God, who makes Himself us, that He may make us Him! That Holy Spirit, that uncreated Love, alone comprehends the love of Jesus in this marvellous mystery!”

She never spoke to me on this subject without profound recollection and a kind of ecstasy. These are again her own words:—

“The soul does truly derive invincible strength from Holy Communion, when it understands the sense of those words of our Lord: ‘As I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me.’ Now, the mortal and corruptible creature cannot by

its own power raise itself, the Saviour must by Holy Communion descend into the soul to make it a partaker of His life and of Himself; by this divine participation His grace and love establish in it a new life, new affections all holy and pure, giving it a strong aversion to the very name of sin, however slight, and new inclinations to good and to doing all things according to the good pleasure of God and for His glory, from the sole motive of pure love.

“I ought to see that Jesus comes to me in this Sacrament all pure, all holy, all powerful, all wise, all love; I ought then to go to Him in one of these ways, and after having received Him whom nothing can contain, I ought at least to be all-powerful for good, and all on fire with love.

“Holy Communion gives me a great desire to humble myself, it increases my love of God, and imparts to me strength in that love, a sweet facility in giving up to Him all the affections of my heart, and a certain assurance of divine protection which exempts a person from all fear of deception in the graces she receives. I have been taught and I feel it, that a heart nourished by the precious Body of its Saviour knows by sweet experience, that divine Love happily produces pure love within it; that divine Wisdom furnishes it with all means of pleasing Him, and that Omnipotence strengthens it to make use of those means.

“It is Love that gives the best dispositions for making a good communion; it is He who inspires

strong and efficacious desires of true virtue, and enables us to practise it.

“The grace of Communion gives us more holy liberty, and enables us to make a good use of our free will by the progress the soul makes in the love of God, which effects admirable changes in its nature.

“Thou showest me, O Lord, that by Holy Communion my heart becomes Thy ark, since it so often contains, not the figurative, but the true Manna; and that this heart ought, like a living ark, to prepare to receive Thee in it by emptying itself of all that is not Thee. Our heart is truly an ark of the covenant, since by the Holy Sacrament Thou unitest and bindest us to Thyself; but this ark must be clean by purity, deep by humility, wide by love, and secured by recollection and mortification; this is a lesson which Love taught me by calling me the ark of His treasures. O Lord! render it incorruptible, I beseech Thee, for Thy glory; let no dust penetrate into it, nor let it touch anything that may soil it.

“How highly ought I to value this possession of my God with all His treasures! The Sacred Humanity of Jesus, thus veiled under the sacramental species, is alone an abyss of love that excites me to omit nothing in aiming at the greatest perfection. Nor must I forget that we receive greater abundance of grace in proportion to the increase of our dispositions, and that the Divine Jesus never refuses those which we ask of Him with true confidence in His bounty.

“I have often seen that God comes into our soul

in three ways—sometimes by necessity, at other times glorious, and that often being given, He gives Himself and unites Himself to us. I understood that by those who communicate without making any preparation, when they might have made it, our Lord is received by necessity; that He enters gloriously into the hearts of those who, being overwhelmed with business, have not leisure to prepare themselves, but who yet go to receive this sacrament through love, with hunger and humility. The third, who receive our Lord with the fulness of grace, are those who do their utmost to prepare themselves for it with all the love of their hearts.”

I asked her what her own preparation was. She said: “I seem to find in myself, as it were, a perpetual one, which is given me from one Communion to another by my intimate union with Him who gives Himself to me, and which increases each time; this union is effected as by a transformation of me, a poor, miserable creature, into that great All. By dint of receiving my Jesus there is nothing remaining in me but what I take from Him, or what He excites in me. The taste and savour of the species which last me from one Communion to another keeps me attentive to being faithful under all circumstances. When I only go near the choir or the altar, and above all, when the sacred tabernacle is opened I receive emanations of love from this divine Sacrament; but His mercies have been multiplied since I have kept It incessantly within me.”

Love also gave her this instruction : The soul that communicates bears God, who bears her ; God comes to us to make us go to Him, and we receive Him only because He receives us by grace and by love. It was thus that Bénigne went to the holy table, to unite herself to her God. At other times she strove to purify her soul by acts of loving contrition, saying, " O Jesus, Thou wiltst that I should approach Thee pure to be purified, just to be justified, loving to be incorporated with Thee by love through this sacred food. This love, mingled with filial fear, is the disposition in which Love most wishes us to communicate."

The graces she usually received at Holy Communion were an increase of divine tastes and holy pleasures, which made her aspire to the entire possession of God, and to a greater desire of augmenting His glory.

Once on the point of receiving Communion, not having been able to go to confession, she made an act of contrition, and our Lord said to her : " I render thy soul by love whiter than snow." Our Sisters then chanted the *Beati immaculati*, and she asked of God the grace to walk in His ways with purity. He answered her : " I have already given it to thee, my daughter, and those who shall do everything for pure love and for my glory shall also walk in them." From thenceforth she discerned some souls in our community who especially participated in this same grace.

" My hunger," she said, " for this divine food is so excessive, and I am so ardently desirous of it, that when

I go to the choir to communicate it seems that I do not walk of myself, but that a strong and invisible hand carries me there, so that in whatever state of weakness I may be, I feel that a transport of love is attracting me thither. I prepare myself also for Holy Communion by the intention of gaining the indulgences, especially on the days when they are plenary. I go to that sacred banquet a famished, poor beggar; but before I reach it, I find myself invested with grace, enriched with an abundance of good things, and afterwards satiated with Him who gives Himself to me. At other times I renew my vows; for Jesus makes me understand that He is pleased by my giving myself anew to Him, who so often gives Himself to me. He receives the variety of these vows as a nosegay of flowers, in which His divine Heart deigns to rejoice."

She also went to it to offer herself to the power of God, saying to Him, "Lord, what must I do?" Again, she often presented to Him her feelings of interior confusion; then her Jesus said to her, "Bénigne, I apply to thee through love the merits of those which I suffered before men; they will make reparation for thine."

At the moment of Holy Communion her Spouse frequently said to her, "Bénigne, all my goods are thine, and I, who am the Sovereign Good, am thine." These words of mercy plunged her deeper in her own nothingness, and that nothingness was, as it were, lost in her All. She said to me on this subject, "Such is the value of the graces I receive in Communion, that

I think I should die if I felt the least increase of them. The words of life which the Divine Word pronounces in the ear of my heart, are darts that cause my soul to live and to languish. Before and after receiving that sacred Food, I have often been so seized by the force of love, that my heart fainted with mortal languor; in that state I take the liberty of saying to my two Angels, "Go, go, my faithful confidants, announce to my Beloved that I languish with love."

"When I return from the holy table I seem to bear within me heaven and earth and all things, so that I no longer feel the difficulty I had in leaving the choir; on the contrary, solitude is more pleasing to me, because there I can conceal the excesses of my love."

"For about fifteen years past," she said, "latterly, there is no interval in my hunger for that Bread of Life, as there used to be formerly, when I did not receive this double and heaped-up measure of grace, or rather this substance of grace which is now given me. It seems that God would exhaust the treasures of His bounty by such merciful profusion towards me; I feel so filled with my God that I could do without any other nourishment; and in the hour after Holy Communion I often know not how to discern whether I am in heaven or on earth.

"The grace we receive in this Sacrament is almost immeasurable, and our Lord Himself one day told me it was a grace of propagation. In fact, we can in a thousand ways impart it and diversify our intentions, either to glorify the magnificent bounty of God, or to

praise the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, or to assist the Church militant, the Church suffering, &c."

Our Lord said to her, "Seest thou this Bread made and composed of myself, it is there to sustain thee in thy hard labours." She answered her Spouse, "Alas! what should I do without Thee, the only support of my life!"

When she saw the sacred Ciborium taken out, she admired the dignity of our soul, for which God instituted so precious, so unheard-of a marvel. Once when she was unusually filled with admiration, Jesus said to her, "If I had not already made this divine Eucharistic institution of love, I would make it this very moment for thee, Bénigne of Jesus, that is thy new surname."

Her notes relate that this Food so satisfied her that she had often wished and asked to do without any other; but Jesus said to her, "No; Jesus, the crown of virgins, does not require thee to be so singular."

"Another time," she says, "being inspired to ask for the conversion of sinners, Jesus said to me in express terms, 'At every Communion that thou hast received, for fifteen years, my merciful grace has granted to thy prayers the conversion of a heretic, especially of the most obstinate.' She also often obtained at her Communions the deliverance of some souls from purgatory."

In short, what did not the sweet Jesus grant to His Bénigne, especially at her Communions! He only complained that her requests were too limited: "When wilt thou come with an open heart," He said; "it is I

who incite thee to ask ; ask, and I can refuse thee nothing. What fearest thou? Have I not favoured thee beyond any one now living on the earth?"

She adds that her Jesus also told her that He only asks to be received by His creatures, especially by His spouses ; that the cause of grace not being bestowed in the measure it might be, is that when they prepare to receive Him they do not sufficiently excite themselves to love ; that the faults of ignorance and negligence in learning the dispositions required to approach it, often hinder its marvellous effects. This made me feel extreme contrition for the want of love and respect towards this divine Sacrament, and considering myself the most lukewarm creature in the world, I offered myself in reparation to the divine justice. Then Jesus said to me, " I see Bénigne immolated ; at this moment I apply her sufferings to the salvation of those for whom I will that she should pray to me."

In her fervent Communions, she also prayed ardently for all sorts of persons, but especially for her beloved Sisters. This was her frequent prayer, " May Thy mercy, O Lord, multiply Thy mercies upon us, and in the hearts of all men. May Thy love perpetuate Thy love in our souls."

In her latter years, the abundance of her tears and other still more wonderful effects of her devotion obliged our humble Bénigne to leave the choir and return to her cell as soon as possible. Then she gave herself up to the transports of the love in which she was absorbed, standing with her arms in the form of a

cross, in a state of adoration, making a sort of genuflection, and as if suspended in the air ; in this suffering posture God granted her many graces for her beloved neighbour. Then God often renewed in her the impression of His holy Passion ; but what appears to me the most admirable, is that miraculous duration of the species of the most Holy Sacrament, which she has already mentioned ; this signal favour was granted to her first for one hour, but was afterwards prolonged from one Communion to another. It was the more easy to me to believe this because I should have found it difficult to think otherwise, seeing how she was filled with the fulness of God ; besides all her actions were so impregnated with the spirit of Jesus, that it was obvious that He resided in her in an extraordinary manner.

“ In short,” she said, “ during the whole time I have been in religion, I have never made one Communion without experiencing an increase of grace and of love, or obtaining some new favour, beginning by that one I made at the tomb of my holy Father at Annecy, in which I received the firstfruits of them all ; but now there is no interruption in the union of Jesus with His poor Bénigne ; and in process of time this union has become so pure and so divine, that it no longer even causes me anxiety, or excess, or transports.”

Who could express the tenderness of her love for the Most Holy Sacrament when It was exposed, and the pleasure she took in the decoration of our church, and in the numerous and devout concourse of people ! When

she saw our handsome altar happily finished, she showed her satisfaction by saying to me, "Oh! my dear and true Mother, how happy you are to have contributed to this beautiful work, and how pleased I am to see my Spouse so well lodged, and by your care." These were the only sensible pleasures which our Bénigne was still capable of feeling.

She passed whole nights in postures of suffering and penance at the foot of the holy tabernacle; the night of Holy Thursday every year, and often all those of the Octave of Corpus Christi.

She was very fond of singing or hearing sung the hymns and canticles composed in honour of the Most Holy Sacrament; and we will conclude with her own words: "Poor Bénigne of Jesus will sing with beatific pleasure in eternity, blessed and praised be the love of Jesus who has given Himself to us in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. I adore Him here below, in all parts of the world, but especially in our church where He is, as it were, at home with us."

CHAPTER VII.

HER SENTIMENTS ABOUT THE HOLY FAMILY, JESUS, MARY,
JOSEPH—GRACES WHICH SHE RECEIVED FROM THEM.

AS the life of our Sister Bénigne was wholly filled with Jesus, and as, moreover, it would be labour in vain to attempt to relate all that her life would furnish on this sweet subject, I will only say here a few words on the care which she took to unite herself to His Sacred Humanity, in all that she did, and said, and was; this holy practice had been taught her by the most Holy Virgin and St. Joseph; she had learnt that they both prayed Jesus to offer to the Eternal Father the actions of Bénigne in union with His own. "It is not possible," she said, "to fathom the merit acquired by Mary and Joseph, by this loving contrivance whilst they were on earth, or that which we gain ourselves in proportion as we are faithful in imitating them."

She understood too, the supreme pleasure of Mary and Joseph in the peaceful possession of Jesus during thirty years, and the sweetness of His divine society. They themselves taught her that their whole occupation was to admire Him working, conversing, sleeping, waking, walking, eating, keeping silence, speaking, and praying; it was at this time that our Bénigne, associated with the Holy Family, was melted in delight at the contemplation of its graces and its beauties. She followed her Jesus in all His divine steps. His

three days separation from Joseph and Mary, when at the age of twelve years He stayed behind in the Temple, kept her so occupied that our Lord Himself was pleased to manifest its secrets to her, and to tell her that it had cost more sufferings to His divine Heart than all the pains of His life ; that in the grief of His Holy Mother at that separation, He beheld that which was to make a martyr of her on Calvary at the time of the separation of His Soul from His Body ; that meanwhile, as the Godhead kept both united to Itself, so His love sustained Joseph and Mary, and kept them united to Him ; and that without that secret assistance they would have been unable to endure the cruel suffering of those three days, which was incomprehensible to all but Himself alone.

She followed Jesus to the desert also, but she could never resolve to make known the secrets which He had unveiled to her, either on the subject of His solitude, or on many others regarding His Baptism, and His life and conversation among men. I have, however, found from her notes that she never passed a day without making acts of tender compassion towards the Heart of Jesus for the interior sorrows which He suffered, and that she did the same in regard to the heart of Mary.

This good Master gave His Bénigne continual lessons, to the end that she might conform herself more and more to His evangelical life : " Bénigne," He said, " when they tell thee that thou hast a contradictory spirit, hold on to me as to a firm support, and my

merits will make thy confusion glorious. Come, Bénigne, unite thyself to me who have united the Godhead to the Manhood, two contraries not to be reconciled by any but me." He added, "I will confer on thee the grace of drawing and uniting to myself by means of thy prayers and sufferings many souls during thy life, and after thy death : and the story of the mercies which I have shown thee shall excite to the love of me many hearts in all parts of the world."

Let us now pass from Jesus to Mary, and hear Bénigne herself speak of this tender Mother of our souls. "The graces which I have received from the glorious Mother of my God are numberless ; putting aside that of my vocation to an Order dedicated to her, and, as she has often assured me, so dear to her ; not speaking of the dangers from which she has delivered me, I have still experienced thousands and thousands of times her powerful aid. In the year 1644, when I was in the excess of my painful state I prayed her to come to my help. She answered, ' My daughter, be submissive to my Son, and I will ever be thy Mother.'

"Once as I was passing before one of her oratories, I felt urged to ask of her a grace for my sister : this good Mother said to me : ' I can refuse thee nothing.' On another occasion when I again invoked her on her behalf a voice replied : ' I will assist not only thy sister, but also thy brother and thy family.'

"One day when I was fearful that my infidelities would make my Jesus cast me off, Mary sent me to Communion, wherein I received unspeakable grace

even as she had promised me. It was from this day that the marvellous duration of the sacramental species was granted me ; and as I renewed my secret vows in honour of the Son and the Mother, they both promised me that I should never so fail in them as to forfeit their grace and their love."

It was also in her Communions that our Bénigne learnt to deck herself, so to speak, with the virtues of her beloved Mother, praying her to purify her by her purity, to sanctify her by her sanctity, and to make her perfect by her perfection. "Remember, O Mother of God," she said, "that thy Divine Son has committed to thee the care of making me agreeable in His eyes. Another time when I was seeking how best to invoke and honour her, my good Angel said to me : 'She will be pleased if thou salutest her in these few words: *Ave Mater Dei carissima, dulcissima, refugium meum, ora pro me.*'"

This humble maiden honoured Mary to the utmost of her power ; her first action in summer was to present to her flowers from the garden and say with tender affection, "Holy Mother, I lay at thy feet this rose, these lilies, this orange-blossom, this jessamine, to remind thee to protect the sinners, the people, and princes committed by Jesus to my prayers and my zeal ; and thy Bénigne, the chief sinner, confides in thy power." She used to sing with a holy pleasure the canticles in her praise, for she was wholly penetrated with the sublime dignity of this peerless Virgin. "Who can tell," she added, "the happiness

which Mary possesses in being considered and called continually by the Holy Trinity, and by the whole court of heaven, the true Mother of the Word made flesh, and treated as such? Yes, I know that at the mere name of Mary the joy of the blessed is increased. This good Mother deigned to make known to me her special love for my soul, having regard to the blessing which I have of bearing some of the sufferings of her Son."

A hundred times Bénigne said to me, "This tender Mother has a particular care for souls who abandon themselves to divine Providence; she exhorts me to give myself up to her Son, to keep myself, by fidelity to the presence of God, susceptible to the touches of grace, and then," she adds, "all will be easy to thee, and the Will of God will be the desire of thy heart; she will have me free from fear and under the reign of pure love. Once, though I saw her not, I heard her sweet voice say to me, 'My daughter, thou shalt participate in some of my loving sufferings; but I promise thee my assistance.'"

One Feast of the Visitation she was filled with beautiful and sublime thoughts on the greatness of Mary; she fathomed the holiness of the mystery which shows us this Spouse of the Holy Ghost bearing Jesus the sanctifier, sanctifying St. John Baptist, and filling with grace all his family. She received admirable instructions on the grace of our holy vocation which honours this mystery; she saw that the designs of God for our Institute are great and full of grace; that

all those who embrace it, must try to enter into the dispositions of the children of grace by a purity of heart exceeding pure, by an angelic gentleness, by a dove-like simplicity, by a fervent love for Jesus, crowning all by an entire abandonment to divine Providence as to their Mother, continually aspiring to be sanctified by Jesus with the little St. John.

Elsewhere she says: "To make me more fully understand how high were the graces given to Mary, I was shown all those granted to pure creatures, and they seemed to me high mountains; but when I afterwards compared them with those which I saw in this peerless Virgin, they then seemed to me to be only little hills. I was shown, too, that as a daughter of the Visitation, the graces which I received were derived from those of Mary, and the Holy Ghost appeared to say to me, 'When the Divine Persons call thee queen, add, who follows Mary the Queen of queens; when they call thee by the name of dove, say, who honours Mary, the pure and precious dove of the Holy Ghost; and then when they favour thee with the title of fair, add at once, who loves Mary the all fair and all pure.'"

Bénigne attributed also to the most Holy Virgin the following remarkable grace: "During the octave of one of the great Feasts of this Mother of Mercy, one Friday morning when I awoke, I was consoled and penetrated by the sight of a soul glorified and adorned with the merits of Jesus and by its co-operation with grace. Going afterwards into the garden to hang out the linen of the refectory, I thought of my lukewarm-

ness which lets me do no good perfectly ; and to confound me the more I called to my remembrance all the graces received from my God ; when I saw all this I lost for five hours the power of speech, but not that of action ; our late virtuous Sister Jeanne Thérèse Rusquis, who was helping me, perceived what was passing in my soul, for I did not hide much from her ; and she had the charity never to interrupt my sweet silence. This excess ended with these interior words of Jesus, ‘ Daughter, my love will accomplish in thee all that my word has promised thee ; fear not, I am on thy side.’ A calm followed, and for many days I was so occupied with God, and with the sweetness of these words, that I could neither speak nor act without difficulty ; I did nought but say with a sigh of love, O Jesus, either to co-operate with thy grace, or to die ! Yes, Bénigne wills to be either dead or perfect.”

Our virtuous Sister, thus devoted to the Holy Family, did not forget the great St. Joseph ; she professed a singular gratitude to him for the services which he rendered to the Holy Humanity of Jesus, and she thanked him for these every day.

She used not to speak of this glorious Spouse of Mary without admiring his virtues, his justice, his love for the hidden life, and his dignity. “ Oh, how great is this,” she said ; “ Joseph, the master and head of the Holy Family, the lieutenant of the Eternal Father, the adoptive father of Jesus, foster father and guardian of Him who feeds and takes care of all, Spouse of Mary, protector of all souls devoted to the service of

Jesus and of His holy Mother !” I asked her once if she loved him much, and if her devotion to him was great. “ Oh ! yes, Sister,” she said, “ oh ! who would not love St. Joseph, the amiable keeper of the treasures of Paradise, the faithful guardian of the two masterpieces of the Holy Spirit, Jesus and Mary.”

“ The loving Jesus taught me by these interior words the whole summary of His greatness : ‘ Bénigne wishes to know the excellences of St. Joseph ; let her know, then, that he is seated in heaven near his Spouse, my blessed Mother, in one of the highest places ; that the whole Trinity regards him, treats him, and glorifies him as the foster father of my sacred Humanity, and that we readily grant all that is asked of us in his name and by his intercession.’ ”

“ On another occasion the qualities of this great Saint were expressed to me in so special a manner that ever after, all the praises which I hear of his excellence still seem to me below what I think of him.

“ I have had great graces from him for the benefit of many others and for myself. I have a perfect confidence that his help never fails if he is invoked with faith.

“ Here is a very great grace which this virgin spouse of Mary obtained for me. I asked him that I might know, for my peace of mind, the truth of my way, and that it might be known by those who directed me. When he referred my prayer to his Spouse, she said to me : ‘ *Ne timeas filia mea ;* my Son and I say this to you,’ and then my soul became perfectly calm. But, in short, I can say confidently that

he has always obtained for me what I asked when I have invoked his aid."

This, then, is how our devout Sister honoured this earthly Trinity, Jesus, Mary, Joseph; to contemplate them, to offer frequent praises to them, to imitate them, such was the continual care of her whole life.

In many of her notes we find: "Jesus, my adorable Saviour, be blessed for evermore; blessed be Mary, mother of Jesus; and may St. Joseph, father of Jesus and spouse of Mary, make me acceptable to both!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HER DEVOTION TO THE HOLY ANGELS—GRACES RECEIVED BY HER FROM THEM.



WILL give the very words of our Jeanne Bénigne, which will show us both her great devotion to these celestial Spirits and the extraordinary help which she received from them.

"I can never attempt to express the graces, the assistance, which I have received from the Angels, especially from the two who are always near me. During three years I have enjoyed the sight of them without other interval than that of my short and light sleep; now their presence is often visible to me according to my needs, especially in the height of my pains."

Her two heavenly Guardians not only favoured her with the blissful sight of themselves, "capable," as

she said, "of making me endure anything, and of making my soul happy in the midst of the greatest pains which love can give and inflict on me," but they were assiduous in exciting her to do good, and the most perfect good, and to annihilate herself by penances. "Yes," she said; "they came just after I had taken the most bloody disciplines, to give me new strength by turning away my thoughts from the bodily weakness to which I had thus been reduced, and representing to me the good that had been thereby effected in the souls on whose behalf the divine justice had required this of me. At other times they showed me penance as a fair young princess, representing to me by her majestic air the domain which it has (by its union with the grace and love of God which direct it) over all our sensual and animal nature, to bring it under the empire of this grace and love; and when they had cheered me in this gracious and holy way they said to me, 'Bénigne, God still desires satisfaction; come, take courage, O daughter; thou art too happy to be able at the cost of a corruptible and mortal body to glorify thy Creator; take, take again the instruments of fair and loving penance, begin again thy severe scourgings.' Then I found new strength in my arm to obey the order of these celestial Spirits, who consoled and strengthened me in my torments, saying, 'Bénigne is now making reparation for the injury which such and such a person is doing to God by such and such a sin.' When they allowed me to leave off, they honoured me with their

presence. Alas! how many times have they not afterwards led me themselves to our cell, to take a little repose under obedience, and consoled me in a thousand ways!"

Her two faithful Guardians were also her helpers and companions in her humble and laborious offices. They moved her to employ herself in the service of her Sisters, as serving God in their persons; and although her employment was as fatiguing as could be, and burden enough for three or four other Sisters, she received from them miraculous strength to accomplish it all.

"Sometimes," she says, "when I was alone in the middle of the night, and did not know how to get through so much business, they came near me visibly, and said to me, with a grace that cannot be imagined: 'Bénigne, shake off all remains of lukewarmness, stir up the ardour for our God which burns in thy heart. Have we ever failed thee, dear spouse of Jesus Christ? Are we not faithful and careful helpers? Whom couldst thou find more prompt in coming to thy aid?'"

From that time she found no trouble in what had before appeared to her so difficult. Of this I can also give personal testimony, for having been for a long time procuratrix, as I often used towards midnight to come away from writing, I could not pass by the kitchen without seeing her; and when I expressed to her my trouble at seeing her thus alone, she said to me, with a humble and sweet cordiality and a grave and angelic countenance: "Ah! do not trouble your-

self, little mamma (so she called me), our aids are not far off." I fully thought that the Sisters appointed to help her were at hand in one or other of the pantries, engaged in some other work; but when I had seen the same thing happen many times, I felt quite sure who her aids were who were not far from her day or night, and I was not mistaken.

This dear Sister, so sweetly occupied, when she saw me take the way to our cell, went with me, and did not leave me till she had put me to bed, with kind acts, inspired only by the gentle graces of charity.

Sister Bénigne perfectly distinguished (so she expresses herself) the voice of the Angels from that of the Spouse. This discernment is one of the graces which I call most secret ones.

Sometimes they used to sing with her the hymns of the Church and our spiritual Canticles. They instructed her how to glorify God in a thousand ways. "They taught me," she says, "especially on one occasion, to cease to attend to anything sensible, so as to live the life of an angelical Spirit like them; and often have they convinced me that a little suffices, if we confine ourselves to what is necessary. At such times even that little, especially as to food, was burdensome to me.

"These Princes of the heavenly court often concealed my ills and necessities from creatures, thereby happily to reduce me to receive no help but theirs; often it was by perfumes and odours of Paradise that they ministered to my wants.

"Their great care was to make me thoroughly com-

prehend the meanness of sensible things, which I consequently held so vile and contemptible that I took no account of them, insomuch that I do not now know what it is to take such care of myself as to hinder me from mortifying, annihilating, and destroying myself, and denying to nature all that I can, without acting against the will of God and obedience ; to the end that nothing in me may oppose my dying to all things and living only for God.

“ When it seems to me that for want of such and such remedies or help I am going to die, my Angel friends show themselves, and bring me more relief by the joy which their presence gives me, than all the drugs which the Indies can supply : one would say that their sole care is to refresh and revive my spirit.”

Her notes relate that one of these Princes visited her during the time of prayer, and gave her notice of all that she must do and say, making known to her the faults she had committed against pure love, such as having uttered some words that were a little hasty, and contrary to the bearing perfectly with one's neighbour, telling her in these exact words : “ Bénigne, if thou dost not make thy speech gentle, the faculty of acting and of doing much for the glory of God will be taken from thee.”

“ On another occasion,” she says, “ this angelic Spirit presented to me two golden vessels filled with precious liquors, one of the colour of milk, the other of that of wine ; the one signified the sweetness of the interior life and the purity of the divine savours, the

other represented the force and vigour of the operation of divine love: I accepted both; upon that they were shown to me mixed together in a third vessel which by order of a wise Providence was designed for my use. The Angel told me that I had pleased God and done well in receiving both.

“My Angels agree in teaching me to bear my crosses. They inform me that it is Love Himself which has prepared them, fashioned and formed them for me; that He alone has laid them upon me, and that it is Love too that gives me supernatural strength to bear them. They often add: ‘Rejoice, O maiden, Love is leading thee in the ways of the Lord, and we follow thee therein by His command, Bénigne, our Sister.’”

Often when it was impossible to her to cease from the divine occupation, to employ herself in her domestic duties, her chaste Guardians said to her, “Go, go, spouse of our Master, we will keep thy treasures of grace; thou wilt lose nothing, but thou must leave God for God, and run to serve thy Sisters.”

“At the height of my tribulations,” she said, “they kept near me. When I was reduced to a kind of dark blindness, so that I thought I was in a state which was without knowledge of God, or of what it was to love Him, I used to feel that mortal enemies were making my whole being suffer. The choice was given me of being either delivered from, or of continuing in, this state so cruel and painful. This choosing for myself seemed to me so contrary to my acts of abandonment to God, that I dared not dispose of my

liberty ; then my Angels became visible, and applauded my loving resignation, saying to me, ‘ Bénigne, our Sister, Thy Spouse had permitted our rebel companions to attack thee : they thought to hurt thee by impatience, but their strength has been overcome by the assistance of pure Love. Thou only failest, dear soul, in being too fearful. Why dost thou doubt, and what canst thou fear when thou art protected by the Most High, who can do and does all for thee ? Thou canst not fail in hope in Him without wronging His love ; that love which banishes all distrust between true lovers.”

“ How many times,” she says again, “ have my two Guardians raised me to the foot of the Throne of Jesus and of Mary : there they showed me an innumerable multitude of other Angels, and made me remark their different beauty, and their divers orders. Oh ! how great is the dignity of our soul, for which God employs nothing less than such persons of His court ; and how well, O my God, is Thy love thereby known to me ! But how ought Bénigne, on whom Thou hast bestowed this double favour, to redouble her gratitude ?

“ Oh ! how I wish that every one would think at least once a day of thanking Thee for this benefit, and of the honour which we have of being incessantly in the presence of an Angel !

“ What heed should we take to do all things well if we reflected that we had such an overseer ? I pray Thee, Lord, to make men often remember this marvel of Thy Providence. How ungrateful you are, O men,

whosoever you are, if you do not thank this good God for so august and distinguished a privilege, which has been granted you to encourage you in the way of salvation, and in fulfilling the commandments of God; and to help you to suffer, by the constant secret aid which you receive from them; for, in fact, our Angel Guardian is not only our governor, our guide, our defence—he is a learned preceptor, a true comforter, a strong support to help us to walk in the way to Heaven. For my part, it is impossible to say all that I owe to him, nor yet to him who has been given to me, over and above, by a signal grace; the two even becoming, together with me, gardeners, cooks, bakers, caterers, infirmarians, lighters of fires, and layers of the table. Still more in my languors, in my excesses of love, they became my strength to sustain in me the impressions of grace. In my cell they have done me the favour of relating to me, one after another, the graces which God has shown me. I have, besides, admired, though I did not understand it, their skill in withdrawing me from my elevations of spirit to lead me back to my occupations; for by an incomprehensible marvel they make me attentive in doing everything, without losing hold of the most divine and intimate union with God, never allowing me to fail in my duties of obedience.”

It would need to be a pure spirit like unto these, to be able to relate the graces received from them by this devout maiden, whom they called their sister. “Jesus,” she says, “often sends them to me as illustrious

ambassadors, to assure me of His love, to prove to me the reality of His graces, to teach me His perfections and the beauties of His court, to bring me to the knowledge of His designs towards me, and, in fine, to demand of me a return of love for His love. Oh ! how powerfully does the sight and the familiar conversation of my Angels excite my gratitude towards God ! I place this favour in the first rank after those which He has done to me by Himself and by the Holy Virgin."

Our dear Sister told me also, in her exceeding kindness to me, what she confided to no one else ; that when she entered the choir, the chapter-room, the refectory, and the community-room, she used often to see all the good Angels of our Sisters, sometimes occupying their places, sometimes appearing there with them as princes of a ravishing beauty ; but this happened especially in the chapter and community-rooms. " Their brightness," she said, " was different, and their grace distinguished according to their order. Ah ! Sister, how pleased those Spirits seem when we are faithful to their Master !"

CHAPTER IX.

GRACES WHICH SHE RECEIVED FROM OUR BLESSED FOUNDERS—
HER OPINION OF THEIR HOLINESS AND OF THE PERFECTION
OF OUR INSTITUTE.

IF, according to the Wise Man, children are the crown of their father, we may indeed say that our Sister Jeanne Bénigne was the crown, the glory, and the happiness of our holy Founder, the dear Father of her soul, and that she, in return, placed hers in living under the sweet dominion of his laws in our dear little Institute, a grace on which she set an immense value. And if we can have no doubt that the inspiration of Heaven guided St. Francis of Sales when he was writing his divine *Théotime*, in like manner methinks, we may believe that divine Love, in dictating it to him, had a special view to our Jeanne Bénigne, since she was to retrace it so perfectly and to become a living treatise on the love of God. And, indeed, our holy Father looked down on her from heaven with singular predilection, as the graces she received from him prove; and we have her own assurance that she had no words to express either their number or their worth. She says, "From the first moment that I approached his holy tomb in the church of our first Monastery of the Visitation at Annecy, God made known to me, by the abundance of graces which inundated my soul, that I had at the same time approached the sure haven of my salvation." And then what an act of resignation

did she not make, when, by virtue of obedience, she had to renounce the happiness of being so near the mortal remains of this Saint, and the living relics of his spirit, in the persons of the holy daughters who composed the first Community of the Order, to come to this foundation at Turin !

“The protection of our holy Founder,” she says, “was manifested on a thousand occasions towards his poor daughter Bénigne, but it greatly increased after the decease of our honoured Mother de Chantal. I have never since dared to have recourse to them separately, and, as I have already said, they have always been united in granting the prayers of their daughter. Oh ! how powerful with God is their intercession !”

“Once when I did not dare to go to Communion because of some faults I had committed, I went to take the advice of my beloved Mother de Lucinge, who said to me, ‘You must go before our holy Founders and accuse yourself of your failing, and then follow their orders ; mine will be the same.’ I obeyed, and my holy Father and my venerated Mother said to me, ‘What ! daughter, do we wish you to think yourself faultless ? That is not our intention ; go, humble yourself before your Spouse and then approach the holy table.’” In the sequel she often profited by the advice which that worthy Superior had given her, and she always found the benefit of it.

“My holy Founders,” she says, “used at particular times to give me instruction and correction ; they have frequently assured me that they would always help

me, provided that I were careful to practise gentleness and not to allow any signs of my imperfect repugnances to appear. They teach me the merit of actions done for the pure love of God ; they wish me to neglect the thought of my crosses, and of the imperfect impulses of the passions of the soul, and all which opposes true virtue, rather than to do battle with them, and they assure me that this method makes us more easily gain a happy victory over ourselves, than that of making a violent effort against the effort of evil ; and that when we act thus quietly, and in a way which diverts the mind, we are less withdrawn from union with God."

No daughter of the Visitation desired the canonisation of our holy Founder more than Bénigne. On the death of Pope Innocent X. the whole Institute, with great faith and earnestness, asked God to give to the Church as Sovereign Pastor the great Cardinal Fabio Chigi, in the hope that he, being devoted to our glorious Father, would hasten the cause of his beatification. To obtain this grace one Sister after another made a day's retreat, of silence, of penance and prayer ; Bénigne's turn came at the beginning of April. Our Lord consoled her, saying : " Have no more fear, daughter, the prayer of the Institute is granted." She made no doubt of it and imparted her assurance to our Mother de Lucinge, notwithstanding all that was said to the contrary ; and within a few days the truth of the promise was verified, for this great Pontiff was made Pope on the 7th of April of the same year, 1655, by the name of Alexander VII.

The following year, about five in the morning of the beautiful Festival of Easter, when she was visiting, as her custom was, the oratories in the garden, she received at that of Our Lady of the Rosary the promise that in five years the beatification of our blessed Founder would take place ; and a few days afterwards she learnt that the affair had been put in good train, and that various obstacles raised up by the devil had been overcome, and this was a great consolation to her.

Once during that interval the news was spread that the dear Father of our souls was beatified, and that the decree for it had been issued. The whole house, thereupon, made great rejoicing ; Bénigne alone remained indifferent, and when our Mother de Lucinge upbraided her for this she answered that the news was false. They could hardly believe her, for all the court looked upon it as certain ; but the event proved to be as she had declared. " I was assured," she said on this occasion, " that the beatification would only take place after five years, for our Lord had told me so in precise words." This was verified, for the Holy Father only issued the decree on the twenty-eighth of December, 1661.

She was present in spirit at all that passed at Annecy on the day when the feast of this beatification was solemnised ; she saw the body of the Saint carried in procession and deposited in the rich silver shrine which her Royal Highness, Christine of France, had offered as an enduring monument of her devotion to the Saint, who was born her subject. " I was,"

she says, "surrounded with heavenly odours, which lasted three days, and from the 29th April, 1662, I was made sure of the goodness of the way in which God is leading me, and this delivered me from the cruel doubts on this subject which often used to exercise me. Our Lord made known to me that He granted me this great grace by the intercession of my Blessed Father, to the end that my peace might be no more troubled. I understood, too, in this rapture, the protection which God wills him to have of the daughters of the Visitation and the continual care which this kind Father takes of them from heaven: his love for them is so gentle, so attentive, and so specially adapted to the need of each one, that it cannot possibly be expressed. Ah! how happy are the Sisters of the Visitation in having such a Father! The graces which he obtains for them are without number. I do, indeed, appreciate the blessing of being called to such a holy vocation, which requires and which contains the highest and the sweetest perfection of divine love."

In one of her notes she assures us that she had never had any other attraction than that of living according to the maxims of our Institute, and she declares that she mistrusted everything apart from that. "My very graces would be only illusions if they did not lead me to conform better to all that it teaches and prescribes. In fact, if I had not been obliged by obedience to speak of my interior to so many persons, I would never have done so but to my Superiors, as I used to do the first ten years. Those of our sisters

will be happy who shall keep themselves to that rule of conduct, except in what regards confession."

"O Lord," she wrote again, "how profitable for me has been the change of having come out from my family (though of Thy love for it Thou hast indeed assured me), to be associated to that of the Visitation which is truly Thy family and that of Thy holy Mother. I know that Thy love for my Congregation is most signal. I know that Thou receivest pleasure from it, and that it is for me the gate of salvation. I could not have come to it if Thou hadst not called me and led me Thyself: no, my God, I would never be aught but Thine, and in this Institute which is wholly Thine. If they knew the honour which it pays Thee by that interior spirit which is its proper character, and by its perfection, which is very great, though hidden from the eyes of the world, there is no maiden who would not wish to embrace it. Every religious order I confess, honours God, they are all excellent; but it is certain that the number of chosen and perfect souls is very great in ours, because our particular care is to aim at and attain the highest degree of pure love. God takes pleasure in us as infinite love. God is called a hidden God, and His most sublime perfection is in being an unknown God. Ah! dear daughters of my most beloved Visitation, how happy then are you in being hidden in God, and in having your virtue so little understood by creatures."

God urged her more than usual to write down the graces which He imparted to her on the subject of our

blessed Father: "But I find it an impossibility," she said, "to relate with how many and what abundant ones I have been filled on those words said at the offertory of the Mass of Confessor Bishops: *Inveni David serrum meum, oleo sancto unxi eum*. This unction passed from the powers of my soul to my senses, and from the exterior it returned to the interior, making me say: 'O Lord, how holy and sweet are the comfort and unction of Thy spirit which Thou hast shed so abundantly in the soul of my blessed Founder! Grant, then, sweet Jesus, that it may be carefully preserved by the daughters of Holy Mary, by all these victims of Thy adorable Heart.'"

"Once," I find in her notes, "when they were singing a *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for some happy news, touching the canonisation of my holy Father Francis of Sales, at the verse: *Salvum fac populum tuum Domine, et benedic hæreditati tuæ*, I received a new assurance from our Lord of His love and care of the salvation of His little flock of the daughters of the Visitation, but in words of love so singular and expressive as to leave me no room for doubt about it." The most admirable grace, she also said to me, granted by God to our Institute is the mercy of a true call; and she firmly believed, by the assurance given her by Truth Himself, that all the daughters are introduced into it by a singular destination of God, especially those of this Monastery of Turin. She added, "If anything should be written about me, do not forget to say this for the consolation of all our good sisters; I

believe that our holy Patriarch was heard, when with his own hand he wrote this prayer in the book of the vows of our first Monastery of Annecy, in the year 1611 : ‘ Lord Jesus Christ, listen to the cry of my heart for Thy servants, write Thyself in this book, and never permit any one to put her name there but by Thy inspiration and impulse.’ ”

For the glory of this blessed Father, and the greater consolation of our dear sisters, I shall now give at full length another grace which Bénigne received, and which she calls, either from its circumstances or from the effects which it left in her interior, a true and real vision. This is how she describes it :

“ One St. Antony’s Day, the 17th of January, I went to the morning meditation in profound occupation and confusion at the recollection of the graces which I had received on this day. On entering the choir I saw a great light in the form of a bright pillar, but as the real presence of God in the Blessed Sacrament entirely occupied me in this holy place, I stayed not to look at it. However, I was struck with these words rather in my heart than in my mind : ‘ *Jesus, Light of Confessors.* ’ Now, whether the light came to me, or I entered into it, it is certain that by means of it I saw my blessed Father Francis of Sales, in a very high place in heaven, and around him a goodly number of elect, who appeared to be making great rejoicing, by which the glory of the Saint was increased to such a degree that one might have said it was only then beginning to be manifested. The

blessed Saint appeared to me to be rapt in God, and filled with a beatitude and a bliss far above all that accidental glory which the Church militant procured for him in decreeing his beatification. The Blessed Virgin, a great company of Angels and elect presented to the Saint a great multitude of his daughters of the Visitation. At this sight my glorious Father was raised to a higher and more sublime glory ; his countenance, all radiant, revealed the perfect joy of his heart ; he had an air so gracious, so smiling, so full of majesty, that it left me enraptured at the sight ; his head was surrounded, as it were, by a great circle of light, where the names of his daughters were engraven, some as if on precious stones, others in the form of shining stars. The sheen of the most brilliant in no way diminished the beauty of those who had less ; on the contrary, these seemed to derive a greater lustre from the others. Oh ! how full did the happiness of these innumerable daughters appear to me, which was reflected in turn upon their good Father ! How immense his bliss at seeing them thus saved, sanctified, and glorified by his means ! I saw, indeed, the fulfilment of his hopes, when he called his daughters his mantle of honour, his joy, and his crown. At the sight of all this my spirit and heart were so steeped in joy that I remained several days as if beside myself."

It was an extreme pleasure to hear dear Bénigne enlarge on these marvellous subjects. When she recounted them she put me too into a rapture, and I

must confess that the love of my vocation, which was so ardent that I did not think it susceptible of increase, was yet augmented by these sweet conversations. When I asked her what virtue she thought had acquired most glory for our Saint she answered, "Ah ! Sister, do not speak to me of any particular virtue touching a Saint whose most sublime glory is the miraculous union of all virtues, so well ordered by charity, in his great soul ; their various acts were heightened by an intention of pleasing and glorifying God so pure, so ardent, that in this lies the particular charm of that collection of so many virtues."

Let us go on now to describe the veneration which Sister Bénigne had for our honoured Mother de Chantal. To give her joy in her old age it was only needful to speak to her of this holy Foundress. The least of her counsels was kept by her with an inviolable fidelity. She has many times told me that she had received certain assurance of the glory she possesses in heaven, and such special assistance from her, that she had exclaimed, over and over again : "Ah ! how good it is to be protected by this holy Mother !" Let me give here a little attestation concerning the virtues of this venerable Mother, which she dictated word for word in obedience to one of our Mothers of Annecy, who asked for it in a circular letter to all the Sisters of the Institute, who were old enough to have had the honour of seeing this worthy Mother and Foundress :—

"I, Sister Bénigne Gojos, truly declare in the holy

presence of God that to-day, the 8th of July, 1687, my soul, spirit and heart are still penetrated with the recollection of the great virtues which I remarked in my venerable Mother and Foundress, Jeanne Françoise de Fremiot, Baroness de Chantal. All that I have ever heard of her is far below the opinion which I have conceived of her; she forgot nothing that could make her conduct complete before God, more pleasing to Him, and her perfection more sublime, acting always according to her vow of the highest perfection, but in a way so free, simple, and sincere that it was easily seen that she was filled with God, and that she ever carried Him in her heart.

“ Her zeal for the progress of souls in holy love was incomparable, sparing neither care, nor watching, nor trouble. I have happily experienced this myself, and I have never seen her wearied by all the counsel and care that I desired; when I opened to her my interior, it was easy to see what admirable light and penetration into it God gave her. I only do her justice in saying that, as all was holy in her soul, all intercourse with her was sanctifying. I can testify never to have heard a word from her which did not penetrate the soul with love of God, and which did not impress us with a great desire of virtue, especially of charity and of bearing gently with our neighbour; nor did any one come away from conversing with her who did not feel gladdened in heart and penetrated with the esteem which her holiness inspired. When her Royal Highness Christine of France, on her visit

to our Monastery, deigned to honour our kitchen with her presence, she was constantly praising this great servant of God, especially her humility, which, said she, is conspicuous in everything, and she added that no one had ever spoken to her as she had of the contempt of the world which every Christian soul must have and practise in order to be saved. 'No, no,' repeated this great Princess; 'I have never seen anything so respectful and so courteous as the Mother de Chantal, but also I never witnessed more sincerity and true boldness in saying all that may contribute to the salvation of those with whom she speaks.' In fine, this true Foundress so drew to herself the esteem and love of every one that each seemed to have become the protector of this rising house, enchanted at being able to do some service to the daughters of the holy Mother de Chantal; for so she was even then called."

St. Lucy's Day was, with our Bénigne, a very memorable day, being that of the decease of this Venerable Mother; on it she ordinarily received signal graces and occupied herself especially in weeping over her carelessness and infidelities to the holy teaching which, as she said, the honoured Mother had so strongly urged upon her.

It was also a pleasure to her on this day to see Madame Royale, the royal Princesses, and their numerous Court, who had known the Venerable Mother here, come with such great devotion to venerate her memory in our church, and receive there for the most part very particular graces.

I cannot refrain from adding here what venera-

tion she had for our four first Mothers. "Know, Sister," she said to me, "that these first Mothers of our Visitation were true daughters of the Heart of Jesus, all gentle, all humble, all love for God, all charity for our neighbour; they did not know the meaning of self-interest, of self-consideration. They lived hidden in God; they only came forth to glorify God, Jesus and Mary, and our holy Founder, and for the good and the edification of our Institute.

Bénigne also distinguished many of our Sisters who were already in eternal happiness, or who, still living, more especially glorified our Lord. It is certain that in the year 1687 she made known to me several of the graces of our Sister Mary Margaret Alacoque, of whom there was no talk as yet in our country. She told me that she was a person by whom God would be glorified, and that she would teach a very profitable devotion in the Church. She has also spoken to me of two other Sisters, one of whom I know is living, being acquainted with her by reputation; as for the other, who, she said, had taken only the white veil, I know in what house she is, but I have not yet been able to learn by the circular letters whether she be alive or no. One evening she told me that these three persons were singularly favoured by God, and I asked if they received as many mercies as herself. "Alas," she answered, "they are more faithful than I and merit many more than I do, but in the matter of graces I have no cause to envy them. Oh! How good is God to His poor Bénigne!"

CHAPTER X.

GRACES WHICH SHE RECEIVED ON CERTAIN SUNDAYS AND OTHER PARTICULAR DAYS OF THE YEAR.

NE Second Sunday in Advent," she says in her notes, "having felt a certain fear that I had not enough love for my neighbour, I asked our Lord earnestly for it; at the moment of Holy Communion I saw appear in the Host, with which the priest was going to communicate my Sister Marie Julie Romagnano, whom I followed immediately, a beautiful little child who entered her mouth. I experienced deep joy at seeing this dear Sister so highly favoured and much better prepared than I. Not that I had the least doubt that my Jesus was in my Host as well as in hers, but I thought that her better dispositions had merited that He should appear in this visible form in which He entered into her bosom; thereupon it was said to me, Bénigne sees now whether she does not love her Sister, who is her chief neighbour, since she is sensible of such true pleasure at the grace with which I distinguish her. Then I thanked this kind Jesus for having consoled me in this way.

"One Sunday before Christmas," she writes, "I found all my passions so fighting together that I thought I was, as it were, possessed; I had been warned some days previously that I was to pass through a stormy sea in which I should be as if

drowned and overwhelmed with affliction ; thereupon I recognised the truth of the prediction. My trouble was so universal that I could hardly distinguish any longer the emotions of the superior from those of the inferior part ; in this state I felt pressed to ask our Lord Jesus Christ to deliver me, and I united my sufferings with His, and cried out, without well knowing what I was saying, ‘O Lord ! deliver me, leave me not, Lord. May I be near Thee to drive from me those who are fighting against me.’ But as I knew that this violent storm was to last five whole days, my desires for deliverance redoubled my pain, and it seemed to me that I was opposing God’s designs for me. Rational creatures and the devil appeared to be leagued against me to bring on me a heavy load of persecution and of rude sufferings ; the Will of God was still my compass, but my hold on it was so hidden that I did not feel it ; nevertheless I knew that it was keeping me firm in adoring the command of God, and making me suffer with a sweet adherence to His good pleasure. But on the sixth day, Love came and raised me suddenly into infinite favour, and at the beginning of Mass I saw our Lord stooping as if bearing a heavy burden, and He said to me, ‘I take upon myself the suffering of my daughter.’ ‘Blessed be God,’ I say to myself, ‘for the consolation which this vision gave me, and for the peace which it bestowed upon my soul.’”

One Sexagesima Sunday, this dear soul was sensible of a profound sorrow at seeing the loss of the good

seed of grace in so many souls, by the sins which are committed in carnival time; she would willingly have given her life to destroy sin and gather up this precious seed. She would gladly have had all her members torn asunder in order to reunite these souls to God and repair the dishonour which He receives by them. She offered herself afresh to His justice to undergo all the torments in the world. "I gave myself to Love," she says, "as one beside herself with love, to try to glorify so good a God whom I saw so offended and outraged by His children; I was so transported by this zeal that I was as if separated from myself and carried in an instant, I know not how, into one of our cellars, where, going on with my morning meditation which I was making in the choir, I found myself in a profound occupation, withdrawn as if into a solitude at the end of the world, where I perceived nothing but God. I was sensible of an incomprehensible sweetness on finding myself alone with God alone. I buried myself in this retreat to draw nearer to Him; but I was given to understand that I had been led into this place only to contribute, in some measure, to the reparation of the wrong which sin does to this great God. I experienced a mortal anguish from the consideration that this horrible monster outrages an infinite Beauty. The desire of avenging this injury against God put me into a burning fire by which I felt consumed. O Love! what cruel torments thou then madest me suffer! I knew that I

was a sacrifice to divine justice, and as His voluntary victim I took care not to fly from an angry Judge. I saw myself before Him laden with the sins of many creatures, and trembling with fear at being given up to His full power, from which nothing could withdraw me, because His love had here abandoned me to His might. After this I found myself in black darkness, without perceiving the least ray of light, and as if without hope of any issue therefrom, but Divine Love, hidden in my heart like a fire in the muddy waters of tribulation, upheld me in the midst of this anguish, which lasted till the end of the carnival."

"One Passion Sunday, when I was only thinking of preparing myself for Holy Communion, I cast my eyes on the great processional Crucifix, covered with a veil according to the custom of the Church: my sorrow became so excessive that it took away the use of my senses, and in the elevation of spirit into which I passed, I could only repeat the words, 'Jesus hidden from His creatures!' At the same time I received a new impression of the Passion of my Saviour, and, penetrated by His mortal sufferings, I prayed this sweet Love not to leave me, and, moreover, not to hide Himself from my Sisters any more than from His poor Bénigne. He made me see for my consolation that it is never He who leaves us, since His delights are to be in our heart, and His divine pleasure to reign in us as absolute Master."

She learnt on this occasion that the return of love which God demands of each soul in whom He takes

special pleasure is a constant contempt for the pleasures of earth, requiring that the heart shall not admit any with application of mind. "Ah!" she says in her notes, "if the love of my Saviour is pleased to dwell in me, I am very sensible that I have no joy but in Him: this is a gracious favour which He has promised me to show to whomsoever He shall find willing, by a true reciprocal love, to take pleasure in Him because He takes pleasure in us.

"On another Passion Sunday I felt an extreme sorrow on seeing that the Jews had tried to stone Jesus, my Spouse, and that they had compelled Him to hide Himself; thereupon I said to Him, in a transport of sorrow, that my pride and my want of observance were stones which I had been the first to cast at Him. I made great acts of contrition, I renewed my respect for the Holy Humanity of the Word made flesh, I conceived burning desires that it might be honoured by all the earth, and that its infinite value might be clearly known by all creatures. I made Him lovingly welcome when I received Him in Holy Communion, upon which it was promised me that I should never lose attention to the presence of God, and that my heart should be, as it were, filled with Him."

One St. Sebastian's Day she was elevated to an excess of spirit upon hearing in the Gospel for the day that the crown is given only to those who persevere to the end. When she asked earnestly of God for this final perseverance, her nothingness was at once shown

to her with all the shortcomings of her life, and this made her fear the abandonment of grace after having been so highly favoured by God. But after the Communion, her holy Spouse, seeing her all trembling, could not allow her to be in this trouble, and said to her, with extreme love, "Be comforted, my daughter, be calm, and fear no more: I shall be with thee as long as I shall be God:" and then at once she gave herself up and sacrificed herself anew to pure Love, abandoning herself to bear its most painful operations.

"On another occasion," she says, "I was strongly impelled to renew all my vows and abandonments; but wishing to make again my act of immolation to divine justice, I hesitated a little; then Jesus Christ said to me, in my inmost heart: 'What! Bénigne then hesitates now to sacrifice herself to my divine justice! She has forgotten that I have been sacrificed on the Cross, by my love, to the justice of my Father! . . . that for her that justice is surrounded with mercy, while that of my Father, in my regard, was infinite, and of extreme strictness! . . . My ungrateful spouse forgets, too, that my treasures are hers, and that she can offer the value of them to the Most Holy Trinity for the intentions which she desires!'

"Upon this, as if raised to the throne of my Jesus, I said to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, 'Lo! now I give myself to Thee anew; I subject myself, I dedicate myself to Thee to honour for ever the ineffable union of the Divine Persons, to sub-

mit to the power of the Father, to abandon myself to the wisdom of the Son, to immolate myself to the love of the Holy Spirit! . . . I consecrate myself to Thy merciful justice, O my God, the God of my heart. I acknowledge that Thy bounty has been beforehand with me, that Thy mercy has chosen me, that Thy charity has drawn me to Thee, even before the charm of Thy love was known to me as it is now! . . . O merciful Father, accomplish then in me Thy work! Take possession of me to the full extent of Thy power, and receive the absolute homage of all that I am, which I pay Thee at this moment, better and with more love than I have ever done.' ”

This new lover received signal and almost innumerable favours on the Feast of the glorious St. Mary Magdalen. On one occasion, among others, when, in order to try her more thoroughly, strong disapproval had been shown her on the subject of these same divine graces, she says: “I commended myself in the excess of my sorrow to the prayers of some of our little pupils, and I went to Communion shedding a deluge of tears. Immediately after I had received this Divine Spouse, He said to me, by His secret voice, in terms of love: ‘Be comforted, Benigne; God reassures thee in God as to thy way, but in God all love. Confide in the God of thy heart, who loves thee.’ Oh! with what love did my heart overflow at that superabundant grace! I was lost in the delicious abyss of an Infinite Good. I loved, I love without ceasing, my great God, and I shall never be satiated with

loving Him. Since that day I have been sensibly penetrated with this love; His look animates me and makes me die, but by a death which I prefer to all other life. If I love this gracious Love, I am loved by Him, and the charm of this mutual love contains the whole charm of love itself. I possess and am possessed by love, and in this happy possession I find supreme felicity. I know every moment that I can do nothing without love, and that by it and with it I can do all things.

“Another time, on the same festival, after I had received the Bread of Life, I was raised in God by an excess of love, when I remembered His adorable goodness. In a transport of love I then said, ‘Lord, either firmly my heart to support Thy graces, or draw me to Thee. But rather impart Thy divine favours to the soul of each one of our Sisters, who are so disposed to receive them well.’ An intelligible word, which conveyed to me an ineffable impression of grace, said to me; ‘Daughter, my love does all in thee: it disposes thee, it gives to thee, and by it thou receivest all. None shall enjoy what thou enjoyest, except he come out from material things, and from all that nature asks for beyond what is really necessary.’

“On another occasion the Lord willed that I should follow to Calvary His blessed lover, St. Mary Magdalen. I was entirely without sentiments, and had such a clear view of my own misery that nothing was left in me but a burning desire of seeing God loved by all, but especially by my dear Sisters, and I

would have carried to the heart of Jesus all their hearts as hearts very worthy of His love. I had a distinct knowledge that several of them had that same morning received of His infinite liberality sublime and particular graces, especially in Holy Communion. This excited my gratitude, and obliged me to thank God for them. Shortly afterwards I had a fear that my cowardice might prevent my receiving the same graces. Love said to me: 'Bénigne is ungrateful, for she alone receives more than all the others together.' Oh! how powerfully did these words affect my heart!

"Once on the day of the great St. Ignatius of Loyola," she continues, "I found myself so reduced by infirmities that I had difficulty in behaving with due modesty before God. As I was trying to thank my Saviour for the graces imparted to this Saint I felt a marvellous overflow of them in myself also. In the elevation which this divine mercy caused me I learnt that God had found true evangelical workmen in this great saint and his children: he appeared to me surrounded by an innumerable multitude of Fathers of his holy Society, who walked after him like giants of virtue."

On another festival she experienced an ardent desire of loving God, an extreme sorrow at not having hitherto done so according to His will. She made a strong resolution to allow herself no pleasure but in Him, not even in the sight and consideration of her graces. She was at once aware that this purpose had

been pleasing to her Divine Spouse, and that she was not acceptable to love when she stayed to consider the gifts of God in herself, but truly so when she received them as gifts of His divine liberality ; that nothing should hold her back from losing herself in her Beloved, and that at that very time she had failed in this pure detachment of spirit, since she had applied herself a little to the joy which she felt at seeing God satisfied in her regard.

In fine, Love taught her that not to oppose further His designs for her sanctification she must see, desire, and love nothing but God and in God. After this, when she approached Holy Communion, she was treated and favoured in a manner all divine.

Once more she says : “ On another occasion it was made clear to me that there is in God a plenitude of treasures wherewith to fill the void of our profound nothingness ; it is a plenitude of holy unction, of ardour, of joy, of light, of knowledge, and of love, which fills us with love for the sovereign Good and the sovereign Beauty ; and often there is added a plenitude of strength and vigour, without which the soul, in a mortal body, could not bear such plenitude of grace. Ah ! my Love,” she said, “ Thou comest often into Thy Bénigne, as into worthless mud ; and when my capacity can hold no more, Thou actest as Master in my soul, and preparest it Thyself to receive the continuation of Thy gracious mercy.”

One day, on the Feast of St. Peter of Alexandria, she heard read at table a vision which this Saint had

of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the form represented by the prophet Zachary—bruised, wounded, stricken, His hands and feet pierced—when He answered the prophet that it was His friends who had reduced Him to this state; and when she heard it she was so moved by sorrow that she seemed to have no life left in her. “Alas!” she said, “Jesus has so often called me His friend and His well-beloved, and assured me that I loved Him; is it not I who have treated Him thus? I passed the rest of the day in tears and sighs. All the following night my spirit was raised in God, and I saw only Him in my afflicted heart. In the morning this memory was taken from me, and I remained completely unoccupied by any sentiments, and had in my mind nothing but these words: God, Love! Love, God! At holy Mass my sweet Jesus manifested Himself to His unworthy creature by an intellectual vision again in the same state as that prophet describes Him, but so vividly represented that I fell as if into a swoon on seeing Love so ill-treated. When I came to myself in some degree, I said to Him: ‘Ah! Lord of my soul, who has reduced Thee to this state?’ ‘The Will of God my Father,’ He replied, ‘to heal the ills of those who love me.’ I cried out, ‘Oh! goodness, goodness, goodness!’ and I then entered into an excess of spirit in which this immense goodness inspired me with a new desire of glorifying the Most High abased by love, and for the salvation of His creatures. When I came to myself after that excess, I cried out: ‘O Love!

never any more pleasure for Bénigne but in sufferings, in love, in the privation of all satisfaction, and in the faithful following of Thy adorable designs, that I may see Thy glory increased in us, sweet and chaste Spouse of my soul !'

"Once, on the Feast of the great St. Ambrose, I was in an extreme weakness, without devotion or application in God or to the merits of that Saint, my great protector, so that I said to our Lord : 'Alas ! my sweet Love, since I am so weak that I cannot further the interests of Thy glory as much as Thy goodness desires and signifies to me, I would punish myself for my fault by depriving myself this morning of approaching the holy Table. It is indeed the hardest penance I can impose on myself ; yes, my Jesus, it is carrying my chastisement to the highest point thus to deprive myself of union with Thee by the reception of that Bread of Life.' He made answer with a graciousness and love which penetrated my inmost soul and passed into the marrow of my bones : 'Bénigne, since when hast thou found that thou dost increase my glory, promote my interests, and make reparation for thy faults by keeping away from me ? But as thou intendest to do right, and wishest out of love to deprive thyself of the divine pleasure of enjoying me and receiving thy Jesus, I, Jesus, who desire thy good even as thou desirest my glory, seek the honour of my spouse. I will come to her, I will enter into her, since my love wills her to communicate to-day, and I command her to do so.' Who can

express what that grace was, and the impressions of pure love which it caused in my soul!"

CHAPTER XI.

HER INTEREST, HER DEVOTION, HER PRAYERS FOR PERSONS IN THEIR AGONY AND THE SOULS IN PURGATORY.

ALTHOUGH our dear Sister Bénigne was penetrated with compassion for the souls in purgatory, and used a thousand means to relieve them, above all by applying to them the merits of the sufferings which she endured in union with those of our Lord, her special predilection was prayer for the agonising. "Alas," she said, "the souls in purgatory suffer their pains in repose, in perfect assurance of their eternal happiness, but those who are at their last moments which decide their eternity, how pitiable is their condition! O Sister, how great a charity it is to help our Christian brethren in this state, in which a good act of faith, of confidence, of love, of true contrition, is of so great use and value that it is capable of effacing our sins and obtaining glory for us. Let us then often invoke the power of all the Saints and, above all, the clemency of Jesus and Mary for souls in their agony, that they may be prevented and efficaciously assisted by the help of divine grace to obtain their salvation, the final grace and blessing of going out of this world, if not in an act of pure love,

which is very rare, at least in a state to love God eternally.*

Here is her devout method of practising herself what she wished to recommend to everybody; she retired frequently into her cell, or into some corner, and there prostrating herself with her face to the ground or only on her knees, or, it may be with her arms in the form of a cross, she used to exclaim with love and ardour a soul drawn from the Sacred Heart of Jesus:*

"O holy Humanity of Jesus, pour Thy infinite merits on this poor soul in its agony, may Thy Precious Blood be shed abundantly on it to purify it and inflame it with Thy Divine love.

"Remember, O Divine Jesus, that this soul is Thine, that Thou hast created it and regenerated it in holy Baptism, and redeemed it by Thy sorrowful death.

"O Jesus! deserved by all in Thy agony in the garden of Olives, succour this poor soul, defend it from the enemies who wish to injure it.

"Jesus Almighty, snatch this soul from the hands of those who would withdraw it from Thine.

"Jesus Eternal splendour, grant that this soul may seek to glorify Thee. O my King, Thou who hast willed to give us the merit of Thy confusion, deign to apply it to this poor soul and preserve it from eternal

* This prayer may be found in the spiritual exercise for the Slaves of the Most Holy Eucharist. Ed. Paris, 1744 p. 575. "Prayer for the Agony," composed by the venerable Sister (Beigne) Bénigne of Lure.

confusion for the glory of Thy name and the pleasure of Thy divine Heart so full of love for it. O sweet Jesus, may I obtain through the merits of Thy Passion for this soul whom Thou hast redeemed, a perfect conversion, a true return of love and of penitence, followed by final perseverance.

“O Jesus! by the three hours of Thy painful agony on the Cross may this soul obtain from Thy mercy the grace to make true acts of faith, hope, and charity.

“O Divine Lamb, immolated for us, grant that it may be humble, patient, obedient; may it pardon its neighbour every shadow of offence; may it have no feeling against him; but may it have a lively sorrow for having offended Thee who art Infinite Goodness.

“O Jesus! my Saviour, by Thy extreme abandonment, make it bear its own with peace, resignation, and love.

“O Jesus! I can do nothing, Thou knowest, and it can do nothing without Thy grace. Deign, O merciful Redeemer, to pour it out upon this soul and upon me.

“O Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, be to it a Jesus! keep it in that grace which Thou hast merited for it; open for it the bowels of Thy mercy; receive it into Thy Sacred Heart through the opening made by the spear.

“O Jesus! may this soul live for Thee alone during its few remaining moments. May it die to live again in Thee eternally, in Thee who art the true Life.

“O Jesus! grant that this soul may listen to Thee

if Thou speakest to its heart ; may adore Thy silence if Thou speakest not, and be entirely submissive to Thy will.

“ O Jesus ! arm and fortify this dying heart, with love, with grace, and with confidence.

“ O Jesus ! Victim of propitiation, purify this soul in Thy Precious Blood.

“ O Jesus ! grant that the weight of Thy graces and mercies may be to this soul a weight of love to enrich it with Thy glory, and not a weight of justice and condemnation. May it consider with a holy and loving trembling the weight of its sins, which have merited and caused the punishment of death ; but may it consider at the same time that the weight of the Cross which Thou hast borne, has acquired for it heaven and the eternal possession of Thy love.

“ O Jesus ! my Saviour, grant that this soul may pass through the gate of Thy sacred Wounds, to appear all pure before Thy heavenly Father, and that it may participate in Thy divine dispositions on the Cross.

“ O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, grant that the last act of the mortal life of this soul in its agony, may be an act of pure love of God. May its last desire proceed from a transport of love, making it sigh after Thee with all its powers. May it make the sacrifice of its life in the same transport of desire to see Thee. May it sigh after Thy eternal mansions, may it spring towards Thee, borne by the living flames of the most ardent charity.

“ O Jesus ! may it mount with Thee to Calvary,

from Calvary to the Cross, from the Cross to Heaven. May it expire in union with Thy last sigh. O Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, be to it a Jesus! and receive it in Thy Bosom. Amen."

To this devotion she added many other practices by which she used to help souls in their agony, especially those of our Sisters. How many of them have we not seen consoled in their pains, and calmed in their agitations, and temptations of the enemy, by her industrious charity. I could cite many striking examples of this which I have witnessed, but I refrain, the rather that no one can doubt of the efficacy of the prayers of this holy soul; and I go on to say something of her sentiments and practices with regard to the souls in purgatory.

"Souls," she said, "which not being pure enough to fly at once to heaven are destined to purgatory, go thither to undergo their pains so lovingly and with a grace of such divine satisfaction that they find their punishment sweet in the justice of the Will of God. Oh! how extreme is their happiness in being assured of the love of their Creator! Oh, Sister, how beautiful it is to see my Saviour on His throne of justice, surrounded by His beautiful mercy!"

This sweet impression had been left in her more particularly by a grace which she received with respect to her sister, which she thus describes: "My young sister having become a religious, doubtless a little out of love for me, in the devout Monastery of Bon-Lieu at Annecy, in Savoy, I was always

apprehensive lest she should have taken this resolution of withdrawing from the world only on account of the changes which the death of my good mother had occasioned in our family, and that her vocation being thus not quite free, she might not apply herself sufficiently to the practice of the true virtues of a religious, and hence I was afraid for her soul ; but God, always good and compassionate to His poor Bénigne, consoled me in her regard ; for one day He raised me to Himself and showed me with what infinite gentleness and loving-kindness He had acted in judging that young spouse : ‘ Yes,’ said this gentle Jesus, ‘ I have given the crown of virgins to thy sister Margaret, religious of Bon-Lieu, to thy young sister, when I judged her at the instant of her death.’

“ This happened on the 14th December, before I had learnt her decease ; and as I remained still lost in the sight and adoration of the goodness of God who had made known to me her death and delivered me from my trouble by showing me her eternal salvation, our Mother de Lucinge came and told me to communicate for the soul of my sister, for she had that moment received a letter announcing her passage to another life. After this Communion I received a new assurance of her happiness, and that Jesus, the crown of virgins, had placed her in that blessed company which follows Him eternally. The interior voice taught me on this occasion that perfection is not acquired by a multiplicity of acts, but by purity and uprightness of intention, and by the pure love with which they are

done ; that the most agreeable virtue by which the soul of a religious can please its God, is submission and obedience to the Divine Will : that this poor child had devoted herself to this, and had thereby merited much.

“ After this grace I was for a long time occupied with the sweetness which I had experienced at the sight of Jesus my Sovereign Judge. The remembrance of the perfect equity with which the souls of His elect are judged enchanted me, and the representation of the holiness and grace of His countenance beatified me, as it were. Yes, I understood what this adorable Saviour shows at the moment of death to the just soul when He judges it, and how the soul receives His judgment with love, submission, and perfect docility.”

Who could tell all that Bénigne did and suffered to relieve these poor souls ! Often she obtained their deliverance only at the price of whole days passed in cruel pains of body and spirit, and of nights of continual prayer. Mortification, penances, Holy Communion, and especially the application of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, all were employed to hasten their eternal glory and their union with the Sovereign Good. And God, faithful to His oft-repeated promise to grant her prayers, often showed her a great number of these souls delivered through her means from their pains and sufferings. But notwithstanding all her devotion to helping them, she could not but think them happy in being able, even in their place of detention, to love God perfectly and to be

in like manner loved by Him. "It is this love," she said, "which excites us so powerfully to pray for their relief. Ah! who could express in what manner this tender love of the Heart of Jesus urges me to oblige Him to show grace to these dear sufferers! If we understood the love which God has for them, and the service and the pleasure which we do Him in invoking His mercy for their intention, we should give them our little assistance with an incredible ardour. Sometimes I asked her if she felt much pity for these dear souls: "Yes," she replied, "because their pain is a pain of love, and a martyrdom of love, finding themselves separated from the sight and possession of God whom they already love so much, since they have, according to what has been made known to me, at the instant of their judgment seen God their Saviour, and understood the pleasure they will have in the eternal enjoyment of a Sovereign Good and an Eternal Love. But I assure you," she added, "that their love for the commands of God and for the equity and holiness of their Judge, makes them so submissive, that they would not of themselves go out from the place of their purgatory. Such is the repose which they enjoy in the assurance of their salvation, of their glory, when they see themselves out of danger of offending His infinite goodness and of losing His love and His grace, that they are already as if in an anticipation of beatitude, and esteem themselves too happy amid the most severe of their sufferings.

"But still for all that we must not diminish our

prayers for these suffering souls, because we cannot understand what their torment is in enduring this divine fire which purifies them, and at the same time inflames them with love for the God whom they cannot yet see face to face, for want of purity."

I was once obliged by obedience to ask her what she thought would make our purgatory the longest. She at once made answer, "The want of love, of pure intention with which our best actions are often done. Alas!" she continued, sighing and shedding torrents of tears, "we see and often think people good, who appear so virtuous and who do such holy actions; believe firmly, however, that this goodness often is not good, because it is done without interior spirit and without being animated by that pure love which gives the value to all good actions. She told me fearful things with respect to the length of the pains which certain souls have suffered in this holy prison-house of the divine justice, through which one would not have thought to see so many religious persons pass. "But," she said, "the daughters of the Visitation, who are daughters of a Father and a Mother full of the purest and most disinterested love for God, daughters of a Father and Mother so attentive to practise virtue at all times, with an intention so pure, an interior spirit so attached to the interest and glory of God, will have a speedy deliverance from their purgatory, if they accustom themselves to practise with love, purity of intention, and interior application to all that our Lord has done for us, whatever duty they

do, be it good or only indifferent, be it in their vocation, by obedience, or from any other motive; if they do otherwise and neglect this interior spirit and this pure love, they run the risk of being there a very long time."

As I knew that God favoured her with much knowledge concerning the eternal destiny of many souls passed into the life to come, I tried sometimes to discover what she thought of such and such a one; she said, "Well, they are saved, and are, or will be, in eternal glory." I answered, "That is quite enough." "Oh! no, Sister," she replied; "it is true those souls are happy, but if they could return to this world what, think you, would they not do to acquire a single additional degree of love and of glory, now that they know so well the value of it? Oh! no, no, let us not be content with a little, and with what suffices for salvation; we are wanting in pure love if we are so soon satiated with God. Let us love, let us love much, and we shall receive this so desirable overplus; we love Him when we desire a greater eternal beatitude, because eternal happiness will be given in a greater or less degree, according as we shall have had here below more or less love of God." "But in fine," she often said to me, "I think that God saves more persons than we think, especially by the merits of the communion and prayers of the Saints; but let us not flatter ourselves about purgatory, it is long and suffering, if we do not shorten it by our pure love."

Here, again, we might cite many marvels by

which God recompensed His spouse for her devotion to the souls in purgatory, and many particular graces granted to the fervour of her prayers for herself or others, both inside and outside the Monastery ; but as our object in printing this life has been only to publish and bless the gifts of God to this privileged soul, and to edify our readers by the recital of her faithful correspondence thereto, it only remains for us to support it by the testimony rendered to her virtue by so many illustrious persons, whose merit and authority will certainly bring out the charm of Divine Love in this devout Sister.

TESTIMONY
OF SEVERAL
ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND RELIGIOUS
CONCERNING
THE TRUTH OF THE GRACES OF THE SERVANT
OF GOD
SISTER JEANNE BÉNIGNE GOJOS.

I must say, in the first place, that the various Superiors whom we had during the lifetime of our Sister Jeanne Bénigne, all had much esteem for her, and especially Monsignor Bégiame, who was our Superior for so long a time, either as Vicar-General of his uncle, Monsignor Jules Bergère, or as his successor in the archbishopric. He said once, after making a visit of examination, that we possessed a treasure of grace, of virtue and even of capacity in the person of this devout maiden.

On another occasion when he found that in the election of a Superior, some Sisters had, by I know not what instinct, given their votes to Sister Jeanne Bénigne, he said, "that he would have been very glad to make it a true election and appoint her Superior."

When his lordship honoured our Community with a visit, he always commended himself to the prayers of Mother Bénigne, so he called her.

The Superiors took care to make this devout Sister speak with all persons whom they thought capable of judging of the truth of the divine operations in her soul; the first who did so, with notable profit to her, was Monsignor Benoît Théophile de Chivron, Archbishop of Tarantaise, to whom she made a general confession. He gave her counsels which greatly assisted her in the management of such sublime graces; he judged them to come from God, encouraged her to pursue her way, in which, he said, he saw plainly that Divine Love willed Himself to guide her, and left her that great liberty of spirit enjoyed by the children of God. This great and devout prelate, whose life has been published, told our Mother de Lucinge, that if God had only favoured her with the guidance of that soul, she ought to think herself happy, and he recommended her to give to it whatever time it might require.

Monsignor D. Albert Bally, first Provincial and Visitor-General of the Barnabite Fathers, and afterwards Bishop of Aosta, several times confirmed this dear soul in her ways; this was done in few words, but with that decision and unction which were in him a gift of God. He comforted her especially about the apprehensions which other persons were causing her with respect to her immolation to divine justice, and he proved to her clearly that the mercy, goodness

and liberality of God towards a heart given up to the power of His love are incomprehensible, and that such souls have nothing to fear. Sometimes after conversing with her he used to say to our Mothers, "Of a truth I believe that you have in this Sister something even above what we have in our true saint, Mother Anne Marguerite Clément, who, however, is one of the most highly favoured spouses of Jesus whom I know, although an immense number of them have done me the honour of consulting me about their interior." I heard this glorious testimony myself when I was yet a novice.

Monsignor Charles Auguste de Sales, nephew of our holy Founder, having had occasion to converse with her when he came to Turin, said in his pleasant way that "the words of this soul were to him quite heavenly food. Ah! how glad I should be were she at Annecy."

Monsignor Jean d'Arenthon d'Alex, his immediate successor, also treated her as a chosen soul. Monsignor Henri de Maupas, Bishop of Puy, and afterwards of Evreux, strongly recommended our beloved Mother de Lucinge never to give up the guidance of this great soul, which, he said, was a matter of importance to the glory of God and to our holy Institute.

Monsignor Antoine Godeau, Bishop of Vence, being at Turin on business, gave some hours of his valuable time to this devout maiden. He told her frankly that her direction was an important matter; that she

required a learned and experienced director; but he added immediately: "If that fails you, my child, trust in God, enlarge your heart, and raise it up in Him who will never fail you, and remember especially that your great Father, St. Augustine, says to you by the mouth of Antoine Godeau: 'Love, my child, and do what you will.'"

Our late Mother Jeanne Augustine Machet, who was Superior the seventh year of this foundation, seeing the extraordinary things which passed in the interior of this humble Sister, bade her speak openly about herself to Father Jean Baptiste Baratte, then Rector of the Jesuits in the celebrated college of this city, a pious, learned, and experienced man, who had a high esteem for our holy Institute. He took the trouble to come several times, and gave her the time necessary to arrive at a complete knowledge of all her dispositions. She opened herself so entirely to him that he understood her perfectly, and she consequently called him afterwards the dear Father of her soul, and followed faithfully his counsels, and carefully kept those which he had given her in writing. These are some of them:

"My child, walk in the way of love: the purgative way is good, but you ought not to stay long in it. Go to God as he comes to you—by love. Add to this love a reverent humility, and follow the counsels of your Angels. Be faithful to your vows: the three ordinary ones are the foundations of your perfection,

but the secret ones should carry it to the highest degree. Manifest yourself sincerely to your Superiors, above all to Mother de Lucinge: she is a person well fitted to direct you, and a perfect spouse of Jesus Christ. Always keep in mind your misery, but never lose courage, remembering that God is love and infinite goodness; that there is nothing incredible in His treating certain souls in ways which appear strange to those who have no experience of the excessive love of the Creator towards His creatures. I have seen men, otherwise learned and spiritual, take offence at such miracles of love. Keep yourself, therefore, in peace, knowing that God is admirable both in love and in mercy.

“And, moreover, my child, do not have any more doubt of your way. I have examined it; I have made you resist it. I have been informed of your faults by yourself and by others; you have confessed them; you are well persuaded of your nothingness, of your misery; you are desirous to amend and to practise virtues. All this makes me say that you must keep yourself in repose. Yes, my dear child, be sure that your graces are veritable effects of the goodness of God: your troubles in this matter come from your reflecting too much on yourself, and from your often making mere atoms into great mountains. Believe that I thoroughly know your defects, my child: they are certain natural feelings arising among heavenly favours. Be not so disturbed about them, but draw

from them a more profound humility, and walk with respectful modesty."

Such are the principal instructions which this good Father gave her in writing, and which she often read over with profit and consolation.

Father Jean Pierre Ferrari, of the same holy Society, who had a true devotion to our holy Father, and was a tried friend of his dear Visitation, confirmed her two or three times as to the goodness of her secret vows, and told her that they were, in some sort, of higher perfection than those of St. Theresa and our venerable Mother de Chantal.

Once when he was coming out from a conversation with her, I asked him his opinion of her. "She is a worthy Sister," he said, "and a true mystic exempt from error; she understands what she says. She has much solid virtue, and assuredly she receives much from God."

Father Malines, well known for his great virtue and talent, being Rector of the college of Turin, after having conversed with her and heard her confession during an annual retreat, wrote these words to her: "Prize highly the gifts of God, my child; they are precious and great. Receive them with great reverence, and preserve the remembrance of them with loving confusion. Rely firmly and perseveringly on the promises of this great God. Omit not the daily Communion advised by your confessors, and permitted by your Superiors. The way of love is the

good part which shall not be taken from you ; but favours so divine require from your soul a profound humility."

Father Jean, a discalced Carmelite, who had many times heard both her ordinary and extraordinary confessions, and was himself looked upon as a true saint by all who knew him, said to her: "Sister, you are happy in that God makes use of you to suffer so much for others. The greatest mercy which God can show to a soul is to make it serve His glory at its own cost. Yes, my child, you are thrice happy in sharing the throne of the Cross of Jesus, and bearing your neighbour's burden ; this is the employment which the Eternal Father has imposed on His only Son."

I once asked Father Louis, Provincial of the same great mystical Order, if he knew this humble Sister. He replied, "Ah, how could I twice hear the confessions of this Community without discerning so great a soul ! I believe her to be a holy Sister, and only to hear her talk inspires one with holiness ; her secret vows are of high perfection."

All our ordinary confessors have esteemed and held her to be a chosen scul. M. Jean Paul Truitat, the first whom we had in this capacity, loved and highly esteemed this good religious. One day, when he came to Turin some time after he had been made confessor to our first Monastery at Annecy, he was speaking to me about our venerable Mother Anne-Marie Rosset, and he said that she was a holy soul and

of high perfection like our dear Sister Jeanne Bénigne ; but, he added, the latter is a soul of greater elevation, and God makes her more amiable and active than the other.

M. L'Abbé Corti, doctor in theology, who is at present our ordinary confessor, and whom indeed she revered as her third angel, affirming that it was he whom God had given her for her last guide, destined to receive her last breath, wrote for us in Latin, a testimony to the sincerity and safety of the ways of grace of our dear Bénigne. We give here a translation of it.

J. M. J.

“ As the wisdom of God is always admirable in His Saints, as His tender mercy loves to communicate itself to His creatures, and is pleased to manifest itself by singular graces, and extraordinary gifts to certain privileged souls, not only for their personal sanctification, but also for the edification of others, I account it a duty to make known, for the good of souls, somewhat of the graces with which I know that the Lord has favoured the virgin Jeanne Bénigne Gojos, professed lay-sister. I was charged with the direction of her conscience during the four last years of her life, and I was present at her death, as she had always assured me beforehand that I should be. She related to me with particular confidence all the acts of her life, all the states of her soul, from the first use of reason to the last moment of her

existence; and she declared to me that in so acting, she was obeying a special impulse of the Holy Spirit.

“ 1. She applied herself with care and without intermission to the exercise of the theological virtues, so that in her understanding her faith was great, sublime, and immovable; her hope firm in her will; she reposed in God with a filial confidence, and her heart, ever possessed by an ardent love, had no other aim than God, and to feed on Him.

“ 2. Her fear of the Lord was such that she always conformed her will to reason, and I look upon it as indubitable and most certain that she never lost her baptismal innocence. So great was her innocence and purity of conscience that I am not afraid to affirm, after having heard the confession of her whole life, that she never willingly committed a single venial sin.

“ 3. Her love for God, her ardour to please Him, was so dominant in her heart that this was always her sole desire. I have seen clearly that all her efforts and all her occupations had no other motive, no other rule.

“ 4. Her charity for sinners was so vehement that she very often offered herself as a victim, to be immolated to the divine justice in expiation of the sins of men, and of what she called her own sins. Accordingly, God filled her life with sorrow and suffering.

“ 5. According to this her desire, the Lord crucified her body by tortures so sharp that she was almost driven to despair, but she was immediately

restored and strengthened by special help from on high; and indeed I must confess that her sufferings have often drawn tears from my eyes.

“6. Her humility and her practical knowledge of her misery and vileness were such, especially in her confessions, that she could not have confessed with more abjection had she had to reproach herself with all the wickedness of Satan and all the sins of hell. She came to the holy tribunal as if plunged in an abyss of misery, accusing herself of being what she saw and believed herself to be, and always with such profound humility, such ingenuous docility, such complete sincerity and simplicity, that it filled me with admiration and consolation.

“7. It would be impossible to find matter for a single reproach in her regular observance and fidelity to her vows. The artifice of the devil with souls, when he would make them proud or negligent, is always to inspire them with security as to the state of their conscience, either by making them distrustful towards their Superiors, or by leading them to argue, or to take counsel of themselves. But the spirit which guided this virgin led her to communicate whatever went on in her interior, and this with the sole object of being instructed, and she was the more afraid of guiding herself as the divine mercies and heavenly consolations abounded more and more in her heart.

“8. The Holy Ghost made her pass through all the

F F

steps of the interior life, and through all the states of mysticism, with illuminations and communications of graces altogether extraordinary. I have seen this simple maiden, without study and without instruction, understand the Psalms admirably, quote from Holy Scripture the passages most appropriate to her different states, and use them with a marvellous facility and exactness in giving the account of her conscience. The quotations and applications which I have thus heard her make have firmly convinced me that this was the fruit of divine communications.

“9. She saw everything which took place in her interior with admirable quickness, light, and penetration; in like manner she could lay herself open for the direction of her conscience with all facility and clearness.

“10. She fed on holy discourse with an ardour, joy, and contentment of heart so great that she seemed to take in new life when God was spoken of, and she was as if in an ecstasy when a pious truth was explained to her.

“11. She obtained great spiritual benefit for many souls; mine in particular has derived great profit from her.

“12. No one could form an idea how estranged she was from created things, how averse to all useless conversation and words.

“13. Her love of silence was so great that the practice of it appeared quite natural to her.

“ 14. Solitude was her paradise.

“ 15. The divine illuminations, the heavenly favours, the gifts of mercies which she received in such abundance, were given her one while by God Himself another while by our Lord Jesus Christ, by the holy Virgin, and by St. Francis of Sales.”

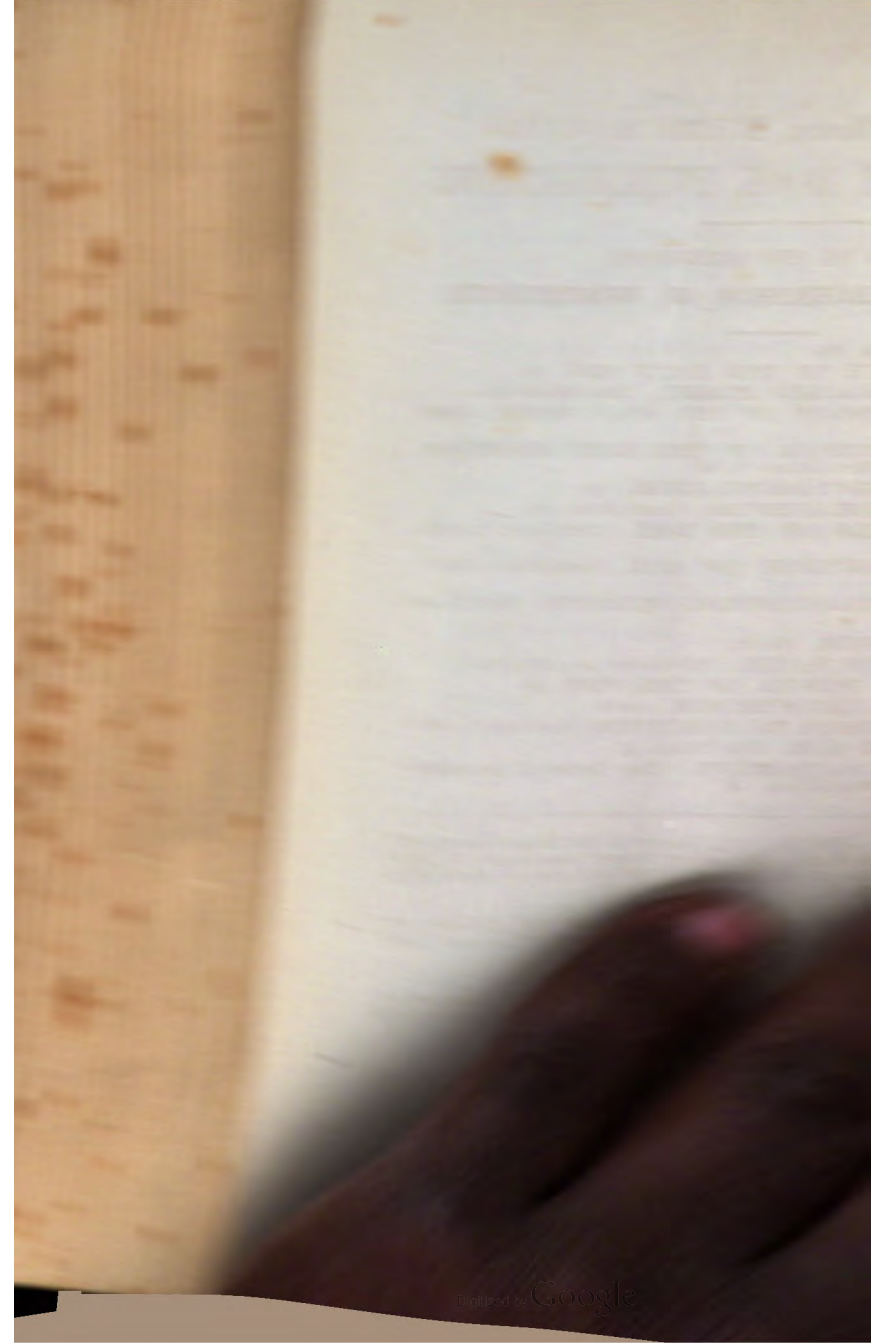
JOSEPH ANTOINE CORTI,

Confessor in Ordinary of the Visitation of Turin.

BLESSED BE GOD.

THE END.

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